

MITIGATING THE BACKLASH:  
US AIRPOWER AS A MILITARY INSTRUMENT OF POLICY

BY  
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I wish to thank Dr Richard B. Andres and Dr Everett C. Dolman for their generous contributions of time and scholarly guidance.

## *Abstract*

In this paper I make the case for the United States' increasing need to use primarily airpower to fight its battles. The primary reason is that airpower is the form of US military might that is least likely to antagonize others when employed, while still retaining robust combat capability.

A secondary goal is to demonstrate that airpower has the capability to achieve a large measure of the policy objectives that are likely to be pursued through military means in the near term.

The core of this thesis lies in the proposition that by employing airpower as the military instrument of choice when armed force is called for, the US will arouse less negative reaction than would the large-scale deployment of ground forces. I begin by citing relevant hegemonic theory that provides substantiation for my assertion that America's actions on the world stage are responded to differently than if it were not a sole superpower.

Next I make the case that airpower provokes the least negative reaction that can be expected in response to the use of military force. History demonstrates a distinction between world reactions to deployments of ground forces versus deployments of air forces (land- or carrier-based) alone.

Finally, I show that airpower, virtually alone, can achieve many policy objectives. Here again I examine the historical record to define the aims airpower has set out to achieve and the extent to which it was successful. I also make the case that the types of missions airpower has shown it can accomplish of late are likely to be similar to those the military will be called upon to undertake in the foreseeable future.

Two final chapters are devoted to case studies of Operations Allied Force and Enduring Freedom. Herein the aforementioned three intertwined hypotheses further borne out.

I do not advocate the use of airpower to fight America's battles for reasons of domestic consumption (i.e., that it is the cheapest, the easiest to employ, risks the least numbers of US casualties). Nor do I suggest that airpower can accomplish all missions requiring military force. Rather, I contend that airpower has an inherently less threatening nature as compared to ground power, particularly as perceived on the world stage, and its use should therefore be considered first when military force is called for.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **Purpose**

In this paper I make the case for the United States' increasing need to use primarily airpower to fight its battles. The primary reason is that airpower is the form of US military might that is least likely to antagonize others when employed, while still retaining robust combat capability. Given the post-Cold War ascendancy of the US to the position of world superpower, the potential for wielding this power in such a way that it provokes other states to balance against it, or further enflames radical Islamic terrorist hatreds, is high. US foreign and defense policymakers are in a precarious position; and the importance of striking the best possible balance between demonstrating willingness and ability to actively defend US interests, and not acting in such a fashion that ultimately endangers those interests, cannot be overstated. The key must be to maintain a full spectrum of worldwide military capability while gingerly navigating this new international setting and climate with a vigilant eye on how the US is commonly perceived. Thus, more than merely being concerned with winning or losing its battles, the US today must be concerned with the response it stirs up among allies and enemies alike regarding how it prosecutes those battles; in short, the means has taken on an importance almost on par with the ends.

A secondary goal of this paper is to demonstrate that airpower has the capability to achieve a large measure of the policy objectives that are likely to be pursued through military means in the near term. It is not the position of this author that airpower can or should be used to achieve every policy goal the US develops. Nor, even, that when employed it should be employed alone, without also pursuing the parallel tracks of

diplomatic, economic, or information options. Further, determining when the tool of military force should be called upon is beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, I demonstrate that airpower has become a powerful military instrument that, when called upon, can serve well in achieving the objectives set out for it. Without establishment of this latter supposition, showing that airpower is the least provocative form of military power is moot.

## **Issues and Methodology**

### **Issue 1**

The core of this thesis lies in the proposition that by employing airpower as the military instrument of choice when indeed armed force is called for, the US will arouse the least negative reaction from among allies and potential enemies alike; certainly less so than would the large-scale deployment of ground forces. Prior to making this argument, however, it is necessary to cite and elucidate relevant hegemonic theory that provides the substantiation for the assertion that America's actions on the world stage are watched and responded to differently than if it were not a sole superpower. It is precisely because of the power position the US currently occupies, and the theorized world response to a state in such a position, that how the US exercises its foreign policy is of such importance and has the ramifications it does. This is the first block of the foundation in building my argument.

### **Issue 2**

Upon the establishment of the demonstrated importance of the world's perception of US actions abroad, the case will then be made that airpower provokes the least negative reaction that can be expected in response to the deployment and use of military force. Several reasons for the distinction in perception between the use of airpower and the use of ground armies will be proposed and examined; it will then be determined whether the evidence bears out these claims. Several historical examples will be drawn upon in an effort to make the distinction between ramifications of, and world reactions to, deployments of ground forces versus deployments of air forces (land- or carrier-based) alone. The most relevant historical cases are those from after the end of the Cold War

(and the fall of the former Soviet Union), as they occurred well into the period where the US had clearly become the world's sole superpower; namely, Operations Allied Force (Serbia) and Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan). Thus, while numerous other historical snapshots will be considered, these two campaigns provide the best insight into world reactions to a perceived hegemon's employment of military might in general, and airpower in specific.

### **Issue 3**

Finally, it will be left to show that once certain types of national policy goals have been delegated to the military to accomplish, airpower, virtually alone, can achieve them. There is strong evidence for this assertion in the two aforementioned recent campaigns where airpower was employed almost exclusively, and where it was able to achieve the objectives set out for it. Here again the historical record will be examined to define the aims that airpower set out to achieve, as well as the extent to which they were ultimately obtained. Further, the types of missions airpower has shown it can accomplish of late are likely to be similar to those the military will be called upon to undertake in the foreseeable future. This assertion does not readily lend itself to case studies or historical substantiation; however, without much difficulty one can combine recent history with a reasonable projection of the near-term future to arrive at a logical basis for making this claim. It requires only a little imagination added to a pragmatist look at current foreign policy vectors. Further, the alternative is to throw one's hands up and claim that, as the future cannot be predicted, the types of missions the military will be called upon to participate in cannot be anticipated; clearly, this approach is unacceptable. Rather, in order to justify the statement that airpower can achieve the policy goals that are likely to be set out for it, an estimation of what those goals are is indeed necessary.

### **Case Studies**

In addition to the support for the above three issues that will be given in each of their respective chapters, two final chapters will be devoted solely to the case studies of Operations Allied Force and Enduring Freedom. Herein the aforementioned three intertwined hypotheses will be further borne out.

## Conclusion

It is important to note the distinction here between advocating the use of airpower to fight America's battles because it represents the cheapest solution or is the most antiseptic or risks the least numbers of US casualties, and citing its inherently less threatening nature as compared to the use of ground forces by a hegemonic power, particularly as perceived on the world stage. A great deal has been written on the former, particularly with regard to how airpower is and will continue to be the US weapon of choice because politicians find it easiest and safest and least expensive to employ, and because it provides stunning high-tech video footage for the nightly six o'clock news.<sup>1</sup> This paper, however, is concerned not with which military arm should be used for the sake of domestic consumption or to appease those who are purportedly casualty averse. Rather, my contention centers on the need to use airpower because of how it is perceived by the rest of the world; namely, by those who would conceivably seek to take down a militaristic hegemon. My goal, then, is to first demonstrate the international ramifications of the US use of military force in pursuit of its grand strategy, particularly in light of its current world standing; but then also to show that airpower is simultaneously the least threatening in that regard, while remaining an eminently qualified means for employing military might and achieving established objectives when required.

## Notes

1. Lt Col Alan W. Debban, "Disabling Systems: War-Fighting Option for the Future," *Airpower Journal*, Spring 1993, 45.

## Chapter 2

# Ramifications Of Us As A Hegemon

### Introduction

This chapter lays the theoretical foundation for the rest of this thesis and explains why it matters.

Since the end of the Cold War and the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the US stands alone as the dominant global power in what is now hailed by most as a unipolar world.<sup>2</sup> This has come about in large measure because of economic and technological changes that have unambiguously favored the US, while other economic power centers have experienced stagnation (Japan, Germany), collapse (Russia, parts of Asia and Africa), or have started from too weak a position to challenge the US in the near term (China, India).<sup>3</sup> This much is largely agreed upon; the ramifications of this new world order, however, are less clear-cut.

Positioned as the world's sole remaining superpower, the US is arguably the first truly global hegemon in history. Many scholars have written on hegemony, its causes and implications; yet, there is little agreement. Indeed, there are almost as many definitions of hegemony as there are authors who have written on the subject. For the purpose of this paper, however, two definitions suffice to provide a clear understanding of the concept and its gravity. First, according to Robert O. Keohane, author of numerous books on international politics, including *After Hegemony: Cooperation and*

### Notes

1. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1997), 10; see also Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 17-18.

2. William Walker, "International Relations in a Unipolar World," *Disarmament Diplomacy*, no. 43, January/February 2000, n.p., on-line, Internet, 8 January 2003, available from <http://www.acronym.org.uk/dd43.htm>.

*Discord in the World Political Economy*, a hegemon is defined as a state with control of a preponderance of material resources; most importantly, raw materials, sources of capital, markets, and competitive advantage.<sup>4</sup> Keohane does not make the case that a hegemon must be militarily dominant worldwide, but only that it must possess enough military power to be able to protect the international political economy that it dominates from incursions by hostile adversaries.<sup>5</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, in contrast, in his book *The Grand Chessboard*, lists “four [different] decisive domains of global power” that a country must master to be a comprehensive hegemonic superpower: militarily, it must have unmatched global reach; economically, it must be the main locomotive of global growth; technologically, it must lead in innovation; and culturally, it must have international clout and appeal.<sup>6</sup> Despite differing definitions, both these experts (and many others) aver the US has achieved global hegemony.<sup>7</sup>

Following from the study of what constitutes a hegemon is an even more controversial body of scholarly thought centered around “hegemonic stability theory,” or, roughly, the conviction that the stability of the international system requires a single dominant state to articulate and enforce the rules of interaction among the most important members of the system.<sup>8</sup> Beyond merely nuanced differences in definitions, there is a great deal of disagreement here as to whether an international order with a single superpower is inherently more or less stable than a multipolar world. Further, and more germane to this chapter, is the equally impassioned disagreement over whether, given a unipolar world with a global hegemon, other countries will seek to bandwagon with the superpower, or attempt to form coalitions to balance against it.<sup>9</sup> This latter issue falls

### Notes

3. Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press), 32.

4. Keohane, 39-40.

5. Brzezinski, 24.

6. Andrew J. Bacevich, *American Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 7; Richard N. Haass, *The Reluctant Sheriff: The United States After the Cold War* (Washington D.C.: Council on Foreign Relations, 1997), 3; Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 81.

7. A. F. K. Organski, *World Politics*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: Knopf Press, 1958); Keohane, 36; Vincent Ferraro, “The Theory of Hegemonic Stability,” n.p., on-line, Internet, 9 December 2002, available from <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pol116/hegemony.htm>.

8. Eric. J. Labs, Robert G. Kaufman, and Stephen M. Walt, “Balancing vs. Bandwagoning: A Debate,” *Security Studies* 1, no. 3 (Spring 1992); see also G. John Ikenberry, *American Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002) which presents a compilation of articles that reference this debate.

into the realm of balance of power theory, which I have broken down roughly into three groups of thought, each with its own key proponents: the first group asserts countries will bandwagon with hegemons,<sup>10</sup> the second believes hegemons will be balanced against,<sup>11</sup> and the final mainstream group qualifies the anticipated reaction to the hegemon based upon how the hegemon conducts itself on the world stage.<sup>12</sup>

I will briefly address the three aforementioned groups, their key advocates, and the theory that underpins each; but the significance of this chapter lies not in the differences among the three factions, but, rather, in their common thread. That is to say, this vast body of study and the heated debate it engenders aptly demonstrates that a globally hegemonic state is watched and responded to differently than are the other countries in a unipolar world. Demonstrating, recognizing, and understanding the ramifications of this fact are necessary first steps in appreciating why it is critical that the US rely on the least militant form of combat power at its disposal (airpower) whenever possible in conducting its battles.

### **Balance of Power Theory: Three Perspectives**

Balance of power theory is one of the oldest theories of international politics, and as such it encompasses a robust body of thought; unfortunately, “it has also been roundly criticized for causing considerable semantic and definitional confusion.”<sup>13</sup> Further, many approaches to international relations theory intersect and intertwine with balance of power theory, such as realism and neorealism. For the purpose of this paper, however, it is only necessary to elucidate three main veins of power balance theory, along with their common contribution to my thesis.

Leading advocates for the position that most countries will join forces, or bandwagon, with an acknowledged hegemon include Robert Gilpin,<sup>14</sup> Robert O. Keohane,<sup>15</sup> A. F. K. Organski and Richard L. Kugler.<sup>16</sup> Bandwagoning behavior has

### **Notes**

9. Organski, 7.

10. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1979), 126.

11. Stephen M. Walt, *The origins of alliances* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), 21.

12. James E. Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff Jr., *Contending Theories of International Relations: A Comprehensive Survey*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Longman Press, 1996), 37.

13. Robert Gilpin, *The Political Economy of International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 86.

14. Keohane, 20-42.



been historically more common than resorting to balancing, especially in the case of smaller states.<sup>17</sup> There are two main reasons states choose to bandwagon: in the first, a state bandwagons for defensive reasons, as a means of aligning with a threatening state or coalition to avoid being attacked itself; in the second, a state bandwagons for offensive reasons, in order to share in the spoils of war.<sup>18</sup> Both Henry Kissinger<sup>19</sup> and Ronald Reagan<sup>20</sup> made public statements that revealed their beliefs that states tend to bandwagon. Napoleon himself held this view.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, they shared a belief common to many in public policy; namely, that states are attracted to strength. The more powerful a state is and the more clearly its strength is demonstrated, the more likely others are to ally with it.<sup>22</sup> Randall Schweller thus concludes that while scholars tend to argue that states balance against hegemons, “foreign policy practitioners through the ages have believed that states bandwagon with power.”<sup>23</sup>

A second viewpoint on the international reaction to the rise of an uncontested hegemon is that, when faced with a hegemonic challenger, other states balance against it. That is, they build up their own power (military, political, economic, etc) and, if necessary, form alliances to create a geopolitical counterweight to the aspiring hegemon.<sup>24</sup> Among those who assert that states will form coalitions to counter a hegemon are Kenneth N. Waltz,<sup>25</sup> John Mearsheimer,<sup>26</sup> Christopher Layne,<sup>27</sup> and Richard

### Notes

15. A. F. K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The war ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 19-23.
16. Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, 91; see also Organski and Kugler, 16.
17. Stephen M. Walt, “Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power,” *The Perils of Anarchy: Contemporary Realism and International Security*, ed. Michael E. Brown (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), 213.
18. Kissinger, 21.
19. Cited in Jerome Slater, “Dominoes in Central America: Will They Fall? Does It Matter?” *International Security* 12, no. 2 (Fall 1987), 105.
20. Quoted in Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict From 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987), 133.
21. Walt, *Alliance Formation*, 212.
22. Randall L. Schweller, “Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In,” in *Perils of Anarchy: Contemporary Realism and International Security*, ed. Michael E. Brown et al. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), 251.
23. Christopher Layne, “Rethinking American Grand Strategy: Hegemony or Balance of Power in the Twenty-First Century?” *World Policy Journal*, Summer 1998, 8-28.
24. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 127.
25. John J. Mearsheimer, “Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War,” *International Security* 15, no. 1 (Summer 1990), 12.
26. Layne, 8-28.

Andres.<sup>28</sup> According to Waltz, empirical data indicates that less powerful states, when free to choose, historically “flock to the weaker side; for it is the stronger side that threatens them.”<sup>29</sup> Waltz further states that, “in international politics, overwhelming power repels and leads other states to balance against it.”<sup>30</sup> Layne adds that though the US is currently enjoying a unipolar moment, that it is precisely that; a moment. He claims that multipolarity will reassert itself in the next five to ten years, because “states balance against hegemonies, even those like the United States that seek to maintain their preeminence by employing strategies based more on benevolence than coercion.”<sup>31</sup> This is a key point, as it marks a line of departure from the third main group of balance of power theorists, who would instead assert that how a hegemon behaves in the international arena determines whether it will provoke a bandwagoning or a balancing response. Layne and others instead believe that regardless of a hegemon’s behavior, history supports the international tendency for states to ally and balance against power.

Stephen M. Walt perhaps leads the third and final group, theorists who believe that hegemonies are not necessarily balanced against; but, rather, that states will balance against a hegemon [or an alliance, for that matter] that represents a perceived threat to their security. The “appeal of balance of power theory as an explanation for alliance formation,” he states, “is unsurprising, given the numerous examples of states joining together to resist a threatening state or coalition.”<sup>32</sup> Others advocating this view include Charles Glaser,<sup>33</sup> Deborah Welch Larson,<sup>34</sup> and George Kennan.<sup>35</sup> Otto von Bismarck was a member of this group as well.<sup>36</sup> Arguing for this case Walt states that predictions as to which countries will bandwagon or balance, based solely on calculations as to the

### Notes

27. Richard B. Andres, “The Balancing Preference: Why powerful states win or lose militarized disputes,” (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, 2001), ii.

28. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 127.

29. Kenneth N. Waltz, “America as a Model for the World? A Foreign Policy Perspective,” *The Use Of Force*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. R.J. Art and Kenneth N. Waltz (New York, N.Y.: University Press, 1993), 669.

30. Christopher Layne, “The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise,” *International Security* 17, no. 4 (Spring 1993): 7.

31. Walt, *Alliance Formation*, 211.

32. Charles L. Glaser, “Political consequences of military strategy: expanding and refining the spiral and deterrence models,” *World Politics* 44 (1992), 497-503.

33. Deborah Welch Larson, “Bandwagoning Images in American Foreign Policy: Myth or Reality?” in *Dominoes and Bandwagons: Strategic Beliefs and Great Power Competition in the Eurasian Rimland*, ed. Robert Jervis and Jack Snyder (New York: Oxford University Press): 85-111.

34. Quoted in Robert Jervis, “Domino Beliefs and Strategic Behavior,” in *ibid.*, 33.

35. Kissinger, 135-36, 166.

relative power of a rising or existing hegemon, are deeply flawed. “Rather than allying in response to power alone,” Walt explains, “it is more accurate to say that states will ally with or against the most *threatening* (his emphasis) power.”<sup>37</sup> He goes on to specify four different things states tend to find threatening: aggregate military capability, proximity, offensive capability, and offensive intentions,<sup>38</sup> and the extent to which each influences the tendency of other states to feel compelled to balance. Walt concludes, neatly summarizing the views of those in this group, that, “In short, the more aggressive or expansionist a state appears, the more likely it is to trigger an opposing coalition.”<sup>39</sup>

### **Common Theme and Policy Implications**

Breaking down balance of power theory, specifically as it relates to bandwagoning and balancing, into three clear-cut schools of thought provides perhaps the best approach to examining the theory’s ensuing implications; the goal here of course is not to fully elucidate this branch of international relations theory, but rather to demonstrate that even where there is disagreement and ambiguity there is a common thread. That is to say, international relations scholars for ages have written extensively on hegemony and balance of power: the definition of regional or global hegemony; the identification of its occurrences in history; the rise and fall of successive hegemonic states together with proximate causes; and the predicted foreign reaction to hegemons and the ensuing stability or lack thereof in the international system. Herein lies the common theme to an otherwise cacophonous body of thought: hegemony carries with it many unique (if not fully agreed upon) ramifications for and amongst fellow actors on the world stage. A country that has amassed sufficient power to be considered, by whichever definition is chosen, a hegemon, stands as the tallest and most conspicuous pole in the international politics tent, and as such merits (and receives) special consideration by those whom its actions ultimately effect, influence or threaten. In the case of a globally predominant hegemon, this includes every country in the world.

Policy implications that result from the US position as a world superpower are therefore far-reaching and must be accorded serious consideration. Statesmen and

### **Notes**

36. Walt, *Alliance Formation*, 213.

37. Walt, *Alliance Formation*, 214-16.

38. Walt, *Alliance Formation*, 218.

scholars alike agree that the recently established position of the US in this role has had, and will continue to have, an impact on how its actions on the world stage are viewed, received and responded to by allies and potential enemies alike. There is significantly less agreement, however, on whether and how the US can maintain its primacy, what the biggest threats to its primacy are, how to acquire and maintain legitimacy in US hegemony, and how this position of hegemony should drive US policy decisions. Indeed, the majority of those discussions fall well outside the scope and purview of this paper. Still, it is interesting to note that policy implications for each of these three groups of thought would have different vectors; to wit, concerns over international perceptions are undoubtedly heightened if one subscribes to the belief that countries bandwagon with a demonstrably strong power or that countries only balance against an aggressive hegemon. Those who believe hegemonic states provoke a balancing response regardless of their behavior are less likely to advocate formulation of a grand strategy that hinges on international perceptions and the need to benignly, if not benevolently, showcase US power. Instead, the latter group usually gives higher priority to successfully managing what they perceive will be a hegemon's inevitable fall from power.

One final aspect of the ramifications of US primacy deserves attention here, in that it further fuels the argument that the US must be cognizant of the international perceptions and reactions its hegemony stirs up; this is the extent to which US political, military and cultural preeminence enflames extant hatreds that might otherwise have remained dormant. One prominent and timely example is that of radical Islam and its hatred of the US as embodied in the terrorist organization al-Qaida. Brought to the fore with the advent of the 11 September 2001 attacks (though certainly present long before that), the extent to which a geostrategically powerful US spreads its tendrils of influence across the globe is widely believed to be directly proportional to the backlash it evokes from those who see the spread of Western culture as a direct affront to their religion or way of life.<sup>40</sup> It matters not whether the spread of US culture is a push or, as is more often the case, a pull situation. Both ensure the outcome of perceived US hegemony.

#### Notes

39. "Many non-Western nations are disturbed by the extent to which their traditional cultures are being invaded by Western – that is, largely US – popular culture (e.g., fast food, Hollywood movies, blue jeans). More than one seer has forecast a coming clash of civilizations." Martin C. Libicki, *What is Information Warfare?* (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1995), 45. See also Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (Summer 1993), 22-49.

The mass appeal of the Western lifestyle, coupled with the increasing presence of US military bases in foreign countries, marks the US as a prime target for terrorism aimed at stomping out the American way of life and its influence in the world. Further, some of the very burdens that beset a sole superpower further intensify disdain for it, e.g., the US arbitration attempts with regard to Israel and the Palestinians. Diligent efforts here have only served to harden the radical Arab mistrust of, and hatred for, the US. Recent military interventions in Kuwait, Kosovo, and Afghanistan, which have left Muslim countries littered with new US military bases, go further still in fueling the terrorist fire. There is an almost circular logic operating whereby the greater US influence becomes, the larger the role it must play on the world stage to protect that influence; and in doing so, the greater that influence becomes. This is the very behavior, benign or not, which, in the eyes of radical Islamic terrorists (and some great powers), marks US dominion with a bull's eye. What may have started as bin-Ladin's desire and attempt to eject the US from the Holy Lands in the Middle East has become a virulent hatred with a much greater goal and much broader support; removal of the US from its hegemonic throne and reclamation of all Muslim nations under his influential cultural spell.<sup>41</sup> This sounds like an extreme measure, but only in this extreme way do the followers of radical Islam believe they can remove the scourge of Western society from the Middle East and simultaneously ensure the US is no longer poised to return.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the greater US power becomes, the more its mere existence enrages and threatens some. While curtailing the US sphere of influence specifically to appease terrorists is dangerous, it is equally inadvisable to ignore them. Where further enflaming terrorists can be avoided without any impact on mission accomplishment (a case I will make in Chapter 4), the US should make every effort to do so.

## Conclusion

The bottom line is that being a hegemon is akin to being a Gulliver in a world of Lilliputians. There is much scholarly debate and little agreement as to how the giant should conduct itself, but there can be little disagreement that to the extent he towers

## Notes

40. Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations*, 209-18.

41. Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations*, 209-18.

above his neighbors his presence and his actions do not go unnoticed. There may be those who will side with the hegemon for sake of being able to draft off his size. There may well be those whose sole purpose is to bring him down, and to unite with others of a like mind in doing so. There may finally be those who wait to see what the giant does before deciding. History does not provide much of a guide as, to date, there has never been such a globally preeminent superpower as the US is now. The goal of this chapter, then, is not to use the unfortunately incongruous tracts of hegemony theory to predict who will balance against the US and who will bandwagon with it. Nor did I set out to recommend future foreign policy or military strategy. Rather, this chapter raises the need for US hegemony to be one of the factors kept in mind when one asks and answers these questions. Simply put, the US cannot afford to conduct its foreign affairs without at least an eye on the type of response its actions will provoke. This is not to say a hegemon must live the role of an appeaser lest it incite its rivals and bring about its own demise; indeed, a compelling argument can be made that even the most benevolent foreign policy will not please everybody. However, it would be equally imprudent for the US not to recognize that all eyes are trained upon it, and how it enacts its policies in the global environment will have far-reaching effect.

## **Chapter 3**

# **International Perceptions Of Airpower**

## **Introduction**

Given the assertion made in Chapter 2 that hegemony is a heavily weighted consideration in prudent foreign policy calculations, the US should strive to avoid appearing overly aggressive or imperialistic. This chapter goes on to show how airpower fits into this scenario. Note that this is an entirely different argument than the argument for the use of airpower as the most domestically satisfactory military alternative. Arguments for cheap versus expensive, easier versus more difficult, slow versus expeditious, low versus high-tech, casualty risking versus casualty averse, and the domestic political attractiveness or lack thereof in each of these, have been put aside. Here the issue at hand is specifically the international reaction to the use of military force in the form of airpower, and the extent to which I can show that it is less negative than would be the response to US deployment of ground power. I base this claim on what I contend are a series of perceptions about US airpower employment, and the extent to which they shape international reaction to its use.

Note that I do not contend that airpower will never be objected to. Rather, for a variety of reasons, air forces are perceived by most as less objectionable than ground forces. There may still be opposition to US use of military force, and in fact elements of balance of power theory would certainly predict as much; but resultant antagonism will be less in both likelihood and magnitude.

## **Why Airpower is Perceived as Less Threatening**

There are many reasons why airpower, notwithstanding all its recently developed

and increasingly honed capability, is viewed as significantly less aggressive and provocative than is the deployment of large-scale ground forces. Some of these reasons may carry more weight at particular times or with particular countries; others may be entirely overlooked or even occasionally invalid; and still others may be held to be true at such deeply implicit societal levels that they are scarcely acknowledged. In the aggregate, however, the following rationales present compelling support for the perceived relative innocuousness of airpower.

### **Airpower is Perceived to be Weaker than it is**

Airpower is generally viewed as less capable than ground power. This is largely a carry-over from earlier wars, though several more recent battles have served to reinforce this belief further. It speaks to a demonstrable perception that airpower, though now precise and high-tech, is still less powerful overall; a tornado vice a hurricane.

In recent history, the US operation in Somalia went far to justify this opinion. From an airhead just barely off the beach, the stated initial intent of getting relief supplies out into the countryside and past the warlords was only minimally achieved at best; it was only with the introduction of the ground forces to escort the supplies and guard the storehouses that the distribution efforts had any success. Not long thereafter, however, with the highly-publicized downing of two Blackhawk helicopters by fairly primitive Somali forces (and seemingly solely because of this), US forces left Somalia with their collective tail between their legs. Airpower had been given a black eye; beaten up by a force that scarcely even qualified as a bully in an operation that wasn't even a war. The resounding perception was that the surgical, if not almost gentle, nature of airpower could not hold its own even in the streets of a third world country. This was also true in Vietnam. Despite constant bomb runs from every type of airplane in the inventory, US airpower in Vietnam proved utterly incapable of stemming the flow of supplies and troops streaming into South Vietnam from the North.

Bracketed by these two very different campaigns, the deserts of Iraq arguably rounded out the argument that terrain considerations drive the success of airpower; that airpower is not suited to jungle or urban operations but is more apt to find success on flat, open desert land where hiding places are scarce. While indeed this may be true, the



inability of airpower to find SCUD launchers in the vast deserts of western Iraq, and the fact that after airpower softened up the ground forces during the early days of Desert Storm a massive tank assault was still required to finish the job, seemingly lend credence to the perception held by some that airpower alone is not capable of achieving objectives or concluding a war on its own, regardless of the terrain.

Critics of airpower's strength also made the case that the follow-on operation in Iraq, intended to remove Saddam's regime and eradicate its weapons of mass destruction (WMD)<sup>43</sup> could not have been accomplished by airpower alone. In fact, the initial deployment of 250,000 ground forces to the region was vocally criticized as insufficient, regardless of what airpower was already bringing to the fight. Indeed, airpower has been patrolling the northern and southern No-Fly-Zones over the majority of Iraq while space assets have been surveilling the actions of the Iraqi leadership, and yet the requirement for a Desert Storm II-type operation, including massive ground forces, was not obviated. This reality likely serves to further the international perception that, despite recent successes, even the US believes airpower alone is insufficient to invade a country, remove its regime, find its prohibited weapons.

Similarly, it has been argued since the early 1900s that populations are resilient to aerial bombardment, and indeed evidence from as early as World War II seems to confirm this.

The Allies repeatedly firebombed German and Japanese civilians en masse in World War II without generating any meaningful domestic pressure on Hitler or Tojo to end the war. In the Korean War, between 1950 and 1953, strategic bombing laid waste more than half the total urban area in 18 of North Korea's 22 largest cities, to no avail.<sup>44</sup>

In fact numerous studies have shown that civilians usually either rally around a leader or respond to bombings by becoming passive.<sup>45</sup> Some argue that precision has changed this pattern and now allows US warplanes to touch a societal nerve that firebombing in

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1. The term "WMD" is increasingly being replaced by the term "weapons of mass effect."
2. Stephen Biddle, "New Way of War?" *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 3 (May/June 2002): 140.
3. Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), 24.

Germany, Japan, and North Korea had not;<sup>46</sup> but, with the historical record such as it is, it is likely safe to assume the belief remains that populations can withstand even intense bombing without losing their will to resist. In fact some recent evidence indicates that air strikes may not only fail to crush national unity and resolve, but may even instill it where it had been previously nonexistent. In Somalia, for example, US Army helicopter strikes on Aideed's subordinates not only failed to intimidate the warlord, but actually provoked anti-US sentiment. Many clan leaders had previously been critical of Aideed's confrontational stance toward the US, yet they united behind him when he was faced with the outside threat. Similarly, Russian attempts to bomb the Chechens into submission during the 1994-96 fighting produced unified defiance, as even residents who formerly favored peaceful solutions--or favored fighting each other--banded together to expel the invader.<sup>47</sup> The same cannot necessarily be said about ground force invasions, which are generally perceived as more intrusive and therefore more difficult to withstand, and thus exact a greater toll on national unity. Further, one need only look at the recent employments of US airpower to note that neither the intent nor the result has been to decimate populations or level cities. To some this is construed as airpower being less powerful than ground forces; for others it means, rather, that the US holds airpower's potential wrath tightly in check. Either way, airpower appears to be much less destructive and vicious than other available forms of military force the US could employ.

A similar argument holds that airpower is more easily defeated than is ground power. Given the aforementioned US reliance on precision strike and minimizing collateral damage, airpower has fallen prey to a perception that it is riddled with inherent weaknesses and is more easily deterred or thwarted than are advancing ground forces. These beliefs take several forms: most notable is the notion that precision-guided air-launched weapons are easily defeated with smoke or fire in the target area (to defeat laser designators and thermal imaging), by adequate concealment and deception practices, or, failing these types of techniques, through the placement of potential targets in restricted strike areas (such as in and around cultural sites, hospitals, schools). Attempts to deny airpower (including surveillance) its intended targets via these methods have been

#### **Notes**

4. Biddle, 140.

5. Daniel L. Byman and Matthew C. Waxman, "Kosovo and the Great Airpower Debate," *International Security* 24, no. 4 (Spring 2000): 21.

prevalent in many forms and in many theaters since even before the advent of precision munitions in the Vietnam conflict and airborne surveillance many years before that. Thus, even in the cases of countries that do not possess sufficiently advanced air defense assets for targeting US aircraft, they still tend to believe they can sufficiently hamstring US airpower efforts. Iraq is a perfect example of this, where, prior to the second Gulf War, they constructed rings of trenches around Baghdad and burned oil in them once the war began, attempting to obscure potential urban targets from laser-guided weapons and aerial surveillance. Even before the most recent conflict, during and since Desert Storm, there has been ample intelligence verifying Iraq has repeatedly hidden missile systems in schoolyards and villages and near mosques. They have also gone to great lengths to create decoy surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) and radars, some quite sophisticated, and to employ previously “strategic” (immobile, point-defense) SAMs in mobile (“shoot and scoot”) roles; all in a demonstrated belief they could thwart Coalition airpower targeting efforts. The same can be said for myriad other countries that have invested in similar asymmetrical techniques, believing them to be useful in countering US airpower: e.g., North Korea with its elevator-served SAMs and tunneled aircraft shelters, Serbia with its use of decoy aircraft and tanks; the Taliban use of natural Afghani terrain features to conceal their limited equipment, and the placement of weapons and equipment within urban areas by all the aforementioned countries. There is clearly a prevalent belief that airborne intelligence can be fooled and airborne targeting and strikes can be denied; particularly with a country such as the US which is clearly so intent on avoiding unintended civilian damage.

As obliquely referenced above, part of the belief that airpower is easily defeated lies in a lack of knowledge of US airpower capabilities. However, as Chapter 4 will stress, airpower in its many forms is capable of a great deal, particularly when combined with the other elements of grand strategy. This may seem at odds with the supposition of this chapter, then, which argues for the presence of a worldwide perception that airpower is weaker and its employment is less blatantly aggressive than are large ground force deployments. However, what seems to be a contradiction is not, and is explained by the fact that few countries fully recognize the strengths and capabilities that US airpower currently possesses. This is most demonstrable in the realm of intelligence, where the

robust collection asset capabilities of the US are often highly classified and thus, by design, largely unknown to potential enemies. Not only does this contribute to the perception that airpower can be easily fooled with concealment and deception techniques, but this also allows the US to operate many airborne and space-based collection assets with impunity. While ground-based collection forces would have to be inserted directly into a country to obtain human intelligence, airborne and space-based assets often do their work at such distances as to preclude the source of their surveillance from even knowing they are being watched. Certainly there is an unmistakable need for ground-based collection; and indeed, the forces that conduct such work are rarely employed in mass or protuberantly (quite the opposite in fact). The point here, however, deals less with the comparison of the two methods, and more with the fact that because so little is known internationally about the true capabilities of US intelligence platforms, their clandestine nature allows the US to use them without appearing overtly militaristic.

### **Airpower is Perceived as Less Imperialistic than Ground Forces**

It has been long-held as an immutable truth that air forces alone cannot take over and hold land; not only is that the first response most Army soldiers or Marines will give when asked what capability holds their service apart from the Air Force, but indeed, Air Force personnel readily concede this distinction as well. In fact, there is no shortage of historical evidence to support the claim that since antiquity, any time territory was forcibly taken and held, it required relatively large-scale ground forces to do it; “boots on the ground,” as it were. Even with airpower having become powerful in its own right since at least World War II, there still remains no viable example that can be proffered where airpower alone has successfully captured ground and prevented its recapture. Further, if it is possible to look at the physics of a situation and make assertions without turning to the historical record, this would be one of those times. It simply stands to reason that, while airpower can make a piece of land temporarily uninhabitable by enemy ground forces, in the final analysis, the actual “holding” of land requires a presence upon it. This is especially true if the ground is not to be made merely a wasteland, but rather is to be milked of resources or incorporated into some type of existing state or nation; and of course these are the most historically prevalent reasons for fighting over and

attempting to conquer land. Teasing out this key acknowledged distinction between air- and ground power, then, leads to an important and popular conclusion: if ground forces are used, it suggests a desire to take and hold land. Recently evidence of this international perception has only mounted. In both Kosovo and Afghanistan, where the US used airpower almost exclusively, even those who opposed those campaigns found reasons to do so other than on the basis of US imperial desires. Most recently in Iraqi Freedom, however, before the first US land unit even set foot inside the country, the mere deployment of ground troops to the region spurred international cries of “occupation force” which have continued to this day, further fueled by Iraq’s vast oil reserves and the early coalition SOF elements’ seizure of the oil heads. It is interesting to note, in addition, that there was no similar outrage over the last twelve years (Saddam excluded), while US and British air forces have essentially laid claim to the airspace over most of Iraq. The direct connection, then, between the US use of ground forces and our perceived designs on territorial gains is both perceptible and noteworthy.

Adding to the less imperial nature of airpower is the fact that in conflicts where the US has deployed its airpower to another region to fight, the established pattern is that once the battle is over, the airpower assets return home. In recent years, and with few exceptions (most notably Iraq’s No Fly Zones and the Republic of Korea), US Air Forces have had little role in what can be termed “peace keeping” or “peace enforcement” operations. Instead, US and combined ground forces tend to carry the preponderance of the burden of post-war missions on the ground in the battle theater, often alongside non-governmental international relief organizations. As a result, the international community has witnessed and likely become accustomed to a pattern where US air forces deploy in (or strike from afar) to fight a particular conflict, and once the fighting is over their role in the region becomes minimal; often relegated to airlifting in peace keeping ground forces and supplies.

The most recent wars the US has fought demonstrate this phenomenon well. In Afghanistan, for instance, airpower (largely in the form of US Navy aircraft and nationally-controlled intelligence assets) was the first on the scene in mass, and was followed by large-scale conventional forces only after the majority of the fighting had waned. Even once the numbers of US ground forces in the country, and their

involvement alongside the Northern Alliance forces, had increased (although still never reaching fever pitch sufficient to result in Enduring Freedom being considered anything other than primarily an air campaign), deployed airpower assets had already begun to focus their attention and move their presence elsewhere. Prior to that, the 1999 war in Serbia, with airpower conducting strike and other operations primarily from bases in Western Europe, was not much different. Once the war was over and Milosevic had capitulated, most of the airpower assets that had deployed into neighboring countries to fight in the war were promptly redeployed to their home stations; in time, they all were. Only since the end of that war has the presence of peace enforcement ground forces been felt. This demonstrates yet another case where airpower deployed in to fight and once the war was over, left; the same cannot be said of ground forces, however, which deployed in to police and control territory, and which remain there still today. The two aforementioned cases will be addressed further in Chapters 5 and 6; however, they are not the only instances where airpower has demonstrated “a deploy in, accomplish an objective, redeploy out strategy.”

Airpower has also routinely left the theater in question after discrete air strikes conducted to achieve limited objectives or merely send signals. One instance here is the 1986 US bombing of several sites in Libya in response to alleged Qaddafi-supported terrorist attacks on Western interests. Another example was the retaliatory Tomahawk Land Attack Missile (TLAM) strikes against targets in Afghanistan after the US Embassy bombings in Africa. A similar case was the 3 November 2002 US use of an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) to find, strike and kill a known al-Qaida leader in Yemen.<sup>48</sup> In all these cases, and there are many more, the airpower assets that were used to execute these operations were withdrawn immediately after they had executed their missions. There was no follow-on deployment of ground forces and no attempt to seize territory; merely the use of airpower to achieve an objective, and the subsequent withdrawal immediately afterward (even, in some cases, when the objective was not fully achieved).

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6. “Yemen Cooperated With Assassination Of Al-Harethi,” *Washington Post*, 6 November 2002, n.p., on-line, Internet, 3 February 2003, available from <http://www.warblogging.com/archives/000311.php>.

Lastly, Operation Iraqi Freedom provides one final example, and rounds out the historical evidence of the three most recent major conflicts the US has been involved in. Here, too, the majority of the air forces deployed to the region for the operation, in addition to the majority of aircraft that had already been there patrolling Iraqi airspace, have begun repositioning and returning home. No such date is in sight for the removal of ground forces from Iraq.

Undoubtedly the paucity of airpower relative to the demand for it plays some role in what has become the general reluctance, if not inability, to have large aircraft deployments remain in battle theaters after their warfighting presence is no longer required. Another reason is the fact that US air forces need to operate at their home stations to accomplish their rigorous training regimens; combat pilots on deployment, in particular, frequently report a decrease in skills due to the inability to train aggressively and to maintain their full range of required proficiencies. However, the reason for the pattern is not as important as its widely-recognized establishment. The fact is that an international perception that airpower deploys in (to the extent that it even has to), fights, then leaves, is well-founded, especially of late. The importance of this point should not be discounted, as it speaks directly to how the use of airpower has consistently broadcast a lack of US imperial designs on the countries it bases from and fights in.

Another reason US airpower is viewed as less imperial than ground forces lies in the perception that the US reliance on airpower to conduct several of its recent battles (some in their entirety, others in large or preliminary measure) was the result of a weak collective US stomach for issues such as casualties and cost—airpower being considered the best way to conduct war on the cheap. This is an international perception, not just one of domestic US politics; and as such, the selection of airpower to fight a battle sends the world a signal of half-hearted commitment to the cause at hand (whether or not intended or even valid).<sup>49</sup> This has negative ramifications for the ability of the US to use airpower as a coercive instrument;<sup>50</sup> but it adds evidence to the claim airpower is viewed as less imperialistic. Specifically, any territory over which the US is perceived as

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7. “Air power is an unusually seductive form of military strength, in part because, like modern courtship, it appears to offer gratification without commitment.” Eliot A. Cohen, “The Mystique of US Air Power,” *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 1 (Jan/Feb 1994): 11.

8. Byman and Waxman, 38.

unwilling to risk life and treasure is hardly to be considered territory it intends to add to its imperium.

For instance, consider the criticism that has been frequently leveled against the Clinton administration for merely “lobbing a few TLAMs” into Afghanistan in response to the 1998 US Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. In light of the terrorist attacks on the US on 11 September 2001, it has become an almost universally agreed upon position that more should have and needed to be done at that time to stem the demonstrated terrorist threat; that the TLAM response was not only ineffectual, but that it demonstrated a lack of commitment to the counterterrorism cause, especially insofar as willingness to commit ground forces and to risk loss of life was concerned. (It is worth adding that the subsequent lack of practical effect of these TLAM strikes served to further the aforementioned perception that airpower is not as capable as are ground forces.)<sup>51</sup>

Another strong case for the signaling of lack of commitment resultant from using only airpower can be made by examining then President Clinton’s express stated intent not to employ ground forces during what became the 1999 Operation Allied Force. This occurrence and its ramifications will be further covered and aptly demonstrated in the case study of that operation (Chapter 5); however, at this point suffice to say that there was a clear worldwide perception of the US lack of dedication to the Kosovo cause as the result of Clinton’s position and the “airpower only” strategy his administration advocated and ultimately pursued.

One additional example might prove useful: that being the use of limited air strikes, or graduated pressure, during the early years of the Vietnam conflict (beginning in 1964). The stated intent here was not to win the freedom of South Vietnam with overwhelming military force, but rather to affect the enemy’s calculation of interest; i.e., to signal to the North Vietnamese the US’s commitment to defend South Vietnam. The response this endeavor received, however, is instructive, if not unique to this particular example. The North Vietnamese viewed the slowly escalating air campaign differently; to them, the US sending airplanes in lieu of Army divisions was proof the US really did

#### **Notes**

9. Rear Adm. (Ret.) Stephen H. Baker, “Responding to Terrorism: What Military Options Does the President Have?” *Center for Defense Information Terrorism*, n.p., on-line, Internet, 8 June 2003, available from <http://www.cdi.org/terrorism/options-pr.html>.



not want to fight in Vietnam, that we lacked resolve and commitment, and that we were unwilling to risk a large number of casualties. Vietnam was indicative of how limited US air strikes are perceived as neither a significant threat nor a compelling promise of future, more damaging punishment.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, the international perception of and response to US attempts to signal commitment and resolve via airpower has often been one of ambivalence at best. Rather than sending a clear signal of US commitment, then, air strikes seem to suggest the exact opposite (an unwillingness to commit ground forces or sustain high risk, high costs, or high casualties).

Finally, though not exclusively the case, large-scale ground forces typically deploy into a country or theater after the arrival of the air assets. Occasionally ground forces are still arriving well after air operations have already commenced. To the extent that ground forces are flown in by air assets, or arrive slowly via sea, this order of arrival is almost an operational necessity. Even if only by pure temporal ordering, then, the arrival of large ground force deployments tends to be perceived as an escalation to a conflict; an additional outlay of the US military muscle that will be brought to bear. Yet, there have also been instances where airpower fought the early portion of a battle and, facing potential defeat or at least protracted war, ground forces were either brought in or their addition was considered. The former was the case in Vietnam, and ground force debates in Kosovo and increased deployments to Afghanistan characterized the latter.<sup>53</sup> More recently, this same pattern was in evidence when the massive troop build-ups in the Persian Gulf beginning late last year followed on the previous twelve years of US and British air forces continuously operating over and conducting strikes in both northern and southern Iraq. The ground force deployment put an exclamation point on the Bush administration's stated intent of transitioning from merely containing Saddam to removing his regime; a certain escalation. Thus has begun a frequently reinforced association between the addition of ground forces to the mix, and an escalation in a given conflict. With this relationship thus forged, the perception that the use of airpower alone

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10. Benjamin S. Lambeth, *The Transformation of American Airpower* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), 12-36; see also Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power: The American Bombing of North Vietnam* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 177-79; see also H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, The Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York, N.Y.: HarperCollins, 1997), 74.

11. Covered further in Chapters 5 and 6.

represents a conflict that falls below the threshold of US imperial interests is further strengthened.

### **Airpower is More Humane**

Airpower has been widely considered to be a reasonably precise and clean form of warfare ever since the advent (and subsequent abundant publicity) of precision-guided munitions. Thus, countries employing aircraft with precision strike capabilities, which comes at greater monetary expense than does the use of dumb bombs for instance, may be legitimately viewed as trying to accomplish military objectives in the most humane way possible and with the least loss of life, even (indeed, *especially*) to enemy civilians. By extension, this furthers the perception that the US uses airpower to attempt to achieve clear and precise military objectives without merely seeking to wreak havoc or rain death from the skies unnecessarily. In fact, television footage of the Iraqi population seemingly carrying on business as usual in Baghdad and other locations under coalition air attack during Operation Iraqi Freedom provided testament to their perception that the air strikes were neither indiscriminate nor directed at civilians. Thus an air force using such dedicated measures to mitigate collateral damage and ensure only specific targets are hit is much less likely to be viewed by international observers as manifestly combative or aggressive. By contrast, according to Charles J. Dunlap Jr., and largely because many of the weapons of land warfare lack the precision capability common to much of the air-delivered ordnance in the US arsenal,

Virtually every military expert today<sup>54</sup> concedes that ground combat—especially in an urban environment—is a casualty-intensive affair for both combatant and non-combatant alike. The horrific scenes coming out of Grozny in Chechnya are but one example of how brutal this kind of warfare can get. To the combatant in a ground campaign every structure is a potential ambush source and must be treated as such by attacker and

### **Notes**

12. Presumably not limited to those in the US.

defender alike. For civilians caught in the middle, there is often literally no place to hide.<sup>55</sup>

Airpower is also less intrusive and obtrusive than ground forces both as it is employed, and in the countries from which it is employed. This is due, in large measure, to airpower's ability to conduct strikes and other operations over great distances. From over-the-horizon bases, ships, and from space, airpower has the ability to find its targets and hit (or observe) them while leaving everything in between unscathed. There are many facets to this aspect of airpower employment that cause its use to be viewed with less trepidation than frequently is the use of ground forces.

First, unlike a heavy army striking deep into an enemy country, airpower does not leave a swath of destruction in its wake. Perhaps this mental image regarding ground power is based on recollections of early times, wherein armies often sustained themselves by foraging and plundering the land they were passing through. Or, it may merely result from the mental image conjured up by an advancing army devastating everything that lies in front of it and claiming occupation of the territory it traverses. It may also result from, as Dunlap stated above, the experience of ground warfare and its more broad-brush approach to targeting. Regardless of the origin of this perception, land armies wreak a certain and undeniable level of havoc on the territory and peoples in between where they deploy from and their objective, and there is little in the way of a parallel statement that can be made about airpower. In fact, the presence of air assets need not even be felt between their launching point and their target; something all the more true for space-based operations. In that regard, the US use of airpower is certain to evoke less obtrusive images for the international community than would the employment of heavy ground forces.

Second, by comparison, because ground forces generally cannot strike from great distances, this limits the potential number of areas from which they can deploy into enemy territory. The preponderance of history dictates, in fact, that when large-scale ground forces are employed from one country, they are going into war in a directly adjacent neighboring country. This is purely a physics problem, wherein sizeable ground

#### **Notes**

13. Charles J. Dunlap Jr., "Kosovo, Casualty Aversion, and the American Military Ethos: A Perspective," *The Journal of Legal Studies* 10, 1999-2000, n.p., on-line, Internet, 8 June 2003, available from <http://www.usafa.af.mil/dfl/vol10.html>.

forces must be employed from within reasonably close proximity to their target, something not true of the deployment of air forces. Operation Iraqi Freedom, Desert Storm before that, and Vietnam before that are relevant examples of this phenomenon, as in each case ground forces punched in from neighboring countries almost exclusively, while air forces conducted operations from far and wide. The need to deploy ground forces from typically adjacent countries carries with it a unique set of problems. Neighboring countries have gone to battle with each other since the dawn of time, and the ease with which this situation can be precipitated has been, at times, startling. Disputed borders (e.g., Ethiopia and Eritrea, Yemen and Saudi Arabia, India and China), subversive incursion forces (e.g., Iraq and Iran, Albania and the Former Republic of Yugoslavia (specifically Serbia), India and Pakistan), and restive nations encamped in the hinterland of sovereign states without a state to call their own (e.g., the Kurds in Northern Iraq, Southern Turkey, Eastern Syria and Western Iran) have all caused bitter conflict and violent dissension over the years. Certainly, adding a third country's ground forces to the shared-border equation only exacerbates a situation where all parties are likely already casting wary glances and questioning each other's motives and postures; and the ability to clandestinely deploy forces to the border region of the country they are intending to advance into is virtually nonexistent. One example of this dynamic was the recent deployment of large numbers of ground forces into Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom, and the apprehension and consternation this caused within Iran (who questioned US intentions vis-à-vis staying in Iraq indefinitely), and within Syria (who was concerned their country would be occupied next. Further, because ground forces must be close to the border they will eventually cross, this means retaliatory or preemptive cross-border attacks into the country hosting these forces are more readily provoked and easier to enact than would be the case against air forces that deploy to and strike from a much greater distance. Iraqi Freedom provides another recent example of this, wherein Iraq launched cruise missiles against coalition ground forces marshalling in Kuwait. While it is certainly true that US air forces deployed anywhere are never truly immune from reprisal attacks (especially terrorist-type attacks), the geographic separation between the air forces and their intended target means the impact on the regional situation is not as

inflammatory and the air forces are not as easily targeted by conventional means; both of these resulting in putting the host country at less risk of attack.

A third beneficial ramification of airpower's long reach is that its deployment bases can be located in remote areas of large countries, thus making their presence less visible and less obtrusive. Consider the Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia, a culturally sensitive country. The base's location placed it far from urban areas at a location where there was little interaction with Saudi locals, something that has historically stirred up additional angst during US deployments to, in particular, Islamic countries. (Relevant to the previous paragraph, a choice of base placement also allowed for maximizing force protection.) Additionally, embodied in the US Air Force's Global Strike construct is the ability to strike territory anywhere on the globe directly from the continental US (CONUS), without requiring a forward deployment at all. This type of out-of-the-way deployment footprint is not as easy with a large ground force; first, ground force footprints tend to be larger, and second, as stated above, ground forces need to be closer to where they will be employed. This means ground forces are likely to be perched on or near the border they will cross in wartime (assuming other than a purely defensive force), and by proximity to the potential enemy country alone they stir up more anxiety than would remotely-located (or, especially, CONUS-based) air forces.

Massive ground force deployments, then, cause more damage both diplomatically and, by extension, physically, to the country that hosts them. This phenomenon can be seen in open source documents and press statements that indicate the deployment of US ground forces to a foreign country tend to spark greater popular protests than do deployments of air forces. Consider the debate that raged in Turkey prior to Iraqi Freedom, and their ultimate refusal to allow the deployment of some 60,000 ground forces to their territory for the then imminent war against Iraq.<sup>56</sup> This is in contrast to the fact that US air forces have been deployed to that country in significant number since 1990, largely without incident or major protest. Further, not only do the historically stronger protests against receiving ground forces place or increase diplomatic pressure on sitting host nation governments but, in fact, these protests often cause a form of civil

### Notes

14. Michael R. Gordon with Eric Schmitt, "Turkey Saying No to Accepting G.I.'s in Large Numbers," *New York Times*, Wednesday, 4 December 2002, sec. 1.

damage of their own, quite apart from anything tied directly to the presence and sustenance of the ground forces themselves. Popular uprisings and subsequent concerns about regime survival in countries that attempted to host US air or ground forces were readily evident during both Allied Force and Enduring Freedom, and will be covered further in Chapters 5 and 6.

## **Conclusion**

There is ample evidence, then, to demonstrate that US airpower is viewed on the international stage as a less destructive and aggressive form of military force than is the use of large-scale ground forces. As shown, there are a number of reasons, most grounded in historical precedent, for the world's attitude toward airpower as distinguished from ground power. While all nations in the world may not necessarily subscribe to all of the above listed perceptions as I laid them out, their effect on popular opinion and subsequently foreign diplomatic actions is, in the aggregate, well substantiated. To demonstrate this claim, the two case study chapters at the end of this paper are devoted to examining two separate wars, and looking for demonstrable evidence of the perceptions listed in this chapter. The result is that their presence in collective international thought is undisputable.

## **Chapter 4**

# **US Airpower as a Military Instrument of Policy**

## **Introduction**

The placement of a chapter on airpower's robust capabilities immediately after a discourse on how airpower is perceived as benign may seem curious; but it is not necessarily contradictory. Recall that the previous chapter dealt with international perceptions of airpower and its capabilities, particularly as compared to large-scale ground forces and the perceived capabilities and militancy thereof. The purpose of this chapter, however, is to examine the record for a more accurate picture of airpower's potential, especially vis-à-vis its ability to accomplish missions and achieve prospective objectives that will likely be laid out for the US military in the future. Demonstrating airpower's less provocative nature is a lost point if it cannot successfully serve as a forceful instrument of US power projection when one is required.

To that end there are three elements to this chapter: first, the need to demonstrate the ability of airpower to successfully achieve a wide spectrum of military objectives virtually unaided by other military means; this will be established through a review of airpower's successes in recent history (operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan, however, will only be cursorily covered here, as a more thorough review of these campaigns follows in Chapters 5 and 6, respectively), as well as by examining the validity of criticisms typically leveled against airpower. Second, to further bolster the case for airpower's potential and capability in military operations, I briefly cover how recent advances in US technology and doctrine compare with the current state of most potential enemy nations' threat capabilities; I also review the calculus of airpower's strengths versus vulnerabilities to that of the ground forces I assert they can often supplant.

Finally, because demonstrating the ability of airpower to accomplish recent or ongoing missions remains apart from asserting its ability to achieve comparable success in upcoming battles, I will conclude this chapter with a brief discussion of the types of missions the US military is likely to be tasked with in the future, in large part driven by the war on terrorism, and how they are apt to be similar to those we have faced (and where airpower has succeeded) to date. Additionally, this latter section will draw upon my premise from Chapter 2; namely, that as the world's sole superpower, the US must be cognizant of how its actions in the global arena are perceived. As a result of this prudent concern, there are now certain types of military missions that are less viable, if not altogether unfeasible, and which should be avoided unless absolutely necessary (e.g., missions that involve sending large-scale ground forces to conquer sovereign territory).

### **Airpower's Substantial Capability**

The ability of airpower to carry out a wide array of mission types largely unaided by ground forces (certainly without large-scale ground forces) has been hotly contested among theorists and practitioners alike since WWI. Since then the evidence has been a mixed bag, each side in this argument using different aspects of the historical record to justify their position. Along those same lines, recent history may be no different; those who cling to the assertion that airpower "cannot do it alone" will find cause to continue to do so. However, to the more objective observer, recent events have shed light on just how much airpower is capable of on its own.<sup>57</sup>

Perhaps two of the best examples of airpower's ability to affect missions assigned to it come from Operations Allied Force in Kosovo and Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. These campaigns are both relatively recent, thus the airpower capabilities they showcase remain relevant; additionally, airpower was the predominant military force used in both these operations, making the success of these campaigns easier to tie directly to that main independent variable. As mentioned, the following two chapters are devoted solely to these case studies and, if my assertions are correct, we will see in both of these instances that airpower, acting largely alone, was able to achieve many of the desired results. The list of skills and achievements demonstrated by airpower in these two

### **Notes**

1. Lambeth, *Transformation*, 232.



campaigns, however, is long and impressive, and deserves at least broad-brush mention here. I will also touch upon a third successful operation which exhibits the ability of airpower, when properly employed, to achieve strategic objectives; namely, Operation Deliberate Force.

First, regarding Allied Force and Enduring Freedom, both of these campaigns were conducted inside the borders of land-locked countries (within Yugoslavia, Serbia has no water access of its own, and traversing the other republic, Montenegro, which has a port, was politically untenable), demonstrating that no region is immune to the threat of airpower purely on a geographical basis. Also in both cases, the preponderance of airpower assets ultimately brought to bear was not based within reach of those territories, but was deployed into (or focused onto, in the case of space-based assets) those regions once the potential for hostilities arose. Airborne and space-based intelligence collection was ramped up significantly in order to provide the basis for planning the ensuing air campaigns, and then continued to provide diligent surveillance throughout the remainders of both operations. Suppression of enemy air defenses and the subsequent achievement of air superiority in the Serbia/Kosovo campaign were well documented; and in Afghanistan air dominance was obtained at the outset. The use of a multitude of platforms delivering a wide array of aerial weaponry, the vast majority of which were precision-guided, rounded out both campaigns and ultimately resulted in their successful culminations. Indeed, platform-weaponry combinations heretofore unseen were brought to bear in both campaigns with great success. Finally, in both cases airpower was able to leverage small numbers of special operations forces (SOF)<sup>58</sup> on the ground to aid with precision targeting, while simultaneously serving as a force multiplier for otherwise insufficiently-armed bands of indigenous fighters (the Kosovo Liberation Army and Northern Alliance, respectively). Terrain, enemy, threats, and consequently missions differed dramatically between these two campaigns; yet, airpower's flexibility and versatility accommodated the shift, and in both cases met the challenge largely unaided.

### Notes

2. Use of the term SOF herein refers to relatively small numbers of highly-trained members of elite units such as Army Green Berets, Navy Sea Air and Land teams, and Air Force Combat Control Teams. Covertly inserted into combat zones and armed with high-tech communications and spotting equipment, these special forces can be (and have been) used as eyes-on-the-ground to call in air strikes, flush enemy troops, assist with reconnaissance, etc.

Nothing I have said thus far as regards the operational capabilities of airpower is shocking, new, or even blatantly controversial. Few will dispute that these two campaigns attest to the evolution of airpower into an awe-inspiring, robust, and roundly capable instrument of military power.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, the capabilities of airpower continue to grow and at such a rate as to outpace the threat. Answering to enemy fighters and ground-based air defenses is increasingly resilient stealth technology and longer-range missiles and bombs. Incorporation of satellite positioning systems into weapons' navigation and targeting computations has reclaimed much of the domain the weather had previously denied. Increasingly sophisticated and capable intelligence platforms have made the enemy ever more vulnerable to strikes from the air, and fewer and farther between are the enemy targets and capabilities which cannot be effectively monitored and ultimately eradicated with the instruments of airpower. Add to this global strike capability, combined with rapid deployment options, and there is nowhere airpower cannot be employed quickly and decisively. Further supplementing global strike capability is the element of global reach intelligence, nicknamed "reach back"; here, US air and space intelligence surveillance assets are able to deploy to and focus on any area of the world while beaming their collection data back to the continental US where the bulk of the heavy processing capability resides, and is thus able to remain. These capabilities have been highlighted in increasing degree at least since the first Persian Gulf War in 1991. While the success of that campaign did not rest exclusively on airpower, the record is strong that airpower was a decisive factor in weakening Iraq's military machine, and in softening up battlefield resistance for follow-on ground forces.<sup>60</sup>

Proponents of airpower point to campaigns such as those in Kosovo and Afghanistan and insist they prove "airpower can do it alone." Those on the fence might be swayed in that direction. The bigger question, however, in the aftermath of two military campaigns won primarily with airpower, is what do the staunch advocates of ground power say?

### Notes

3. Lambeth, *Transformation*, 232.

4. Thomas A. Keaney and Eliot A. Cohen, *Revolution in Warfare?: Airpower in the Persian Gulf* (Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 1995), 104. See also Libicki, 10: Airpower operations directed against Iraq's command and control structures "have frequently been pointed to as *the* (emphasis in original) reason the bulk of Iraqi forces were ineffectual when US ground forces came rolling through." That, "coupled with continuous carpet bombing prior to the ground offensive."

Proponents of ground power often criticize two distinct aspects of airpower's performance in recent campaigns: its inability to accomplish certain strategic military objectives on its own, and its purported failures to achieve smaller, operational- or tactical-level goals. I will examine these now.

First, regarding airpower's lack of ability to single-handedly achieve certain strategic objectives, in some instances there can be no denying this reality; although, often a deeper look reveals these to be failures not of airpower, but of mission definition or the constraints placed thereupon. (Interestingly, some of the cases critics point to are regarded by airpower proponents as overall successes.) Key examples from the would-be list of airpower's recent strategic "failures" are its inability to end Desert Storm without the subsequent ground force invasion<sup>61</sup>; the failure of Operation Deny Flight to prevent Bosnian Serb aggression against United Nations (UN)-established safe areas; and the inability to rapidly eject Milosevic's 3<sup>rd</sup> Army and Special Police forces from Kosovo through strikes on that province alone. Beginning with the example from Desert Storm, it is an unfair indictment of airpower to accuse it of failing at something it never set out to do. It was the stated intention of the planners from the outset of the Gulf War to use airpower to conduct parallel attacks against Iraq's identified centers of gravity and its fielded forces until such time as those forces were degraded sufficiently to allow a rapid and decisive ground force victory (defined as the ejection of Iraqi forces from Kuwait and northern Saudi Arabia) by Coalition ground forces.<sup>62</sup> In this endeavor, airpower from all services was remarkably successful, a fact on which the record and the statistics are clear; especially when one considers the mere three days the largely unopposed ground phase took.<sup>63</sup> The bigger point, however, is that airpower cannot be justifiably accused of failing at a mission it never set out to accomplish. As to the inability of Operation Deny Flight, which began 12 April 1993, to end the Bosnian Serb siege of designated UN safe areas and to gain Serbian adherence to UN mandates, this is most decidedly true. Here, however, airpower was charged with carrying out a mission under tight tactical controls.

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5. Janice Gross Stein argues airpower failed at coercion once the ground war began, because Coalition objections were to induce Iraq to withdraw without having to forcefully expel it through the use of ground troops. "Deterrence and Compellence in the Gulf, 1990-1991: A Failed or Impossible Task?" *International Security* 17, no. 2 (Fall 1992), 147-79.

6. John A. Warden III, *The Air Campaign: Planning for Combat* (San Jose, CA.: toExcel, 1998), 144-53.

7. Cohen, 109.

As acknowledged by then commander of the Allied Air Forces, NATO Southern Command, General Michael Ryan, Operation Deny Flight entailed using airpower in an inappropriate manner; namely, under “UN-imposed restrictions that were very frustrating.”<sup>64</sup> Specifically, “among the many UN constraints that hampered the effective use of allied air power were a ban against attacking Serbian aircraft or air defenses at Udbina [airfield] and UN authorization...to engage only the Bosnian Serb air defense positions that had actually fired on NATO aircraft.”<sup>65</sup> It was not until Operation Deny Flight was escalated into Operation Deliberate Force on 30 August 1995, NATO’s first sustained air operation, that the cuffs were largely taken off of airpower and it was given both a clear mission and the tools to achieve it. The strategic purpose of Deny Flight was to deter further Serbian attacks against UN safe areas, to respond as necessary to such attacks until they ceased, and to coerce the opponents to stop fighting and to agree to negotiate. The air campaign succeeded after only eleven days. As such, it offered resounding proof of airpower’s effectiveness when used with skill and determination,<sup>66</sup> as compared to its potential impotence in virtually the same situation when forced to operate under damaging restrictions. Finally, as regards criticisms of the 1999 air war over Serbia (further treatment of this campaign follows in Chapter 5), it has to be said that ultimately it achieved the desired strategic end state; namely, Milosevic’s forces were compelled to leave Kosovo and their ethnic cleansing of Kosovar Albanians was halted (this is to say nothing of other problems that remain in that province or greater Serbia). Here, however, the criticism of airpower usually rests on the assertion that success took too long and required conducting the air campaign well outside the provincial borders of Kosovo itself. This, again, however, is a fallacious argument. Simply because the initial phases of the bombing campaign, which were indeed heavily concentrated against targets and fielded forces in Kosovo, did not compel Milosevic to remove his troops from the region and to put an end to the atrocities does not necessarily mean airpower failed; perhaps, again, the way in which it was wielded was to blame. In fact, a deeper look reveals that Milosevic was finally compelled to sign a peace agreement once NATO had escalated the bombing campaign to a point where it hurt him personally; that is, until

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8. Lambeth, *Transformation*, 178-179.

9. Lambeth, *Transformation*, 179.

10. Richard C. Holbrooke, *To End a War* (New York: Random House, 1998), 104.

week four when NATO began targeting the so-called pillars of his strength (his political machine, the media, the security forces, and the economic system) Milosevic had barely flinched.<sup>67</sup> The problem, then, was not a failure of airpower to accomplish the strategic goal; rather, it was a failure on the part of NATO planners to tie the strategic goal to military objectives that would bring it about.<sup>68</sup> Bombing targets in Kosovo, even if it had been more successful in rooting out the dug-in Serbian forces and their camouflaged forces (some claim that the damage done in that regard was greatly exaggerated by bad battle damage assessment (BDA) reports<sup>69</sup>), would likely have never produced a Milosevic-backed peace agreement. Therefore, it is inaccurate to say airpower could not achieve the strategic objective; rather, it is more precise to say that bombing Kosovo could not.

Some might take this argument to mean that airpower is capable of doing everything by itself, and that any time it has failed I would claim it was because it was unduly restricted, never set out to accomplish that particular mission, or it was given poor objectives. This is not the case; instead, my assertion is that airpower is a very capable instrument if used correctly against properly chosen targets in situations that dictate the use of military force. Not all situations dictate the use of military force. Not all strategic objectives translate into targets that can be affected by airpower. Clearly there are circumstances where airpower is not the weapon of choice. My point, however, is that many examples of strategic “failures” touted by airpower’s critics are often examples where the blame should be laid at the feet of some other entity.

One further point worth making here is that ground force advocates, though often quick to point to instances of airpower’s purported inability to “finish the job,” often overlook similar cases that can be made for how ground forces cannot always achieve the strategic objectives laid out for them. Somalia stands as a conspicuous example of this; a

## Notes

11. Lambeth, *Transformation*, 187.

12. Regarding targeting in Kosovo, “Even in the best of circumstances, however, [airpower] can never be more effective than the strategy it is intended to support.” Lambeth, *Transformation*, 232.

13. “According to a suppressed Air Force report obtained by *Newsweek*, the number of targets verifiably destroyed was a tiny fraction of those claimed: 14 tanks, not 120; 18 armored personnel carriers, not 220; 20 artillery pieces, not 450. Out of the 744 ‘confirmed’ strikes by NATO pilots during the war, the Air Force investigators, who spent weeks combing Kosovo by helicopter and on foot, found evidence of just 58.” John Barry and Evan Thomas, “The Kosovo Cover-Up,” *Newsweek* 135, no. 20 (15 May 2000): 22.

ground force contingent sent to a third world country to ensure the flow of relief supplies to an impoverished population was, in short, unable to accomplish this goal. I would grant this was a mission racked with problems from the outset, and changing strategic objectives was not the least of them. My point, however, is that just as there are some missions that admittedly airpower alone cannot accomplish (Somalia and that type of urban warfare stands as a likely examples), whether because of the nature of the mission or the bureaucratic and diplomatic restrictions placed upon it, the same is true for ground power; though you will not often hear that conceded by its advocates

Second, with regard to the alleged failure of airpower to achieve certain operational- and tactical-level goals in recent campaigns, a similar argument can be made. For instance, airpower has been proven to be ineffective at targeting and killing leaders of enemy nations. Airpower was unable to find and kill Usama bin-Ladin in Afghanistan, and he and many of his top al-Qaida and Taliban officials were allowed to escape (this campaign will be treated further in Chapter 6). Prior to that campaign a retaliatory TLAM attack on a purported bin-Ladin training camp in Afghanistan proved to be a dismal failure as well. It also appears initial strikes on Baghdad during Operation Iraqi Freedom failed to achieve their goal of killing Saddam Hussein (as did a secondary set of strikes later in the campaign, charged with the same mission). Targeting and destroying Iraqi SCUD surface-to-surface missile launchers in western Iraq during Desert Storm proved nearly impossible. Finally, tactical and space-based BDA from Iraq and subsequently Kosovo was proven to be fallible. Airpower's detractors often point to such recent battlefield deficiencies as proof that large-scale ground forces are always necessary, at least as a supplement to airpower. My response is two-fold: first, airpower is not a panacea for all things and, in every case mentioned above, it fell short of achieving the hoped-for end state. Further, with the possible exception of the TLAM strike into the tents in Afghanistan, all items on this list were reasonable uses of airpower with clearly defined missions and the means to carry them. The simple truth is airpower cannot accomplish all things with perfect accuracy and thoroughness at all times. No military force can. Which brings me to my second point: ground forces could not have done it any better without a significant increase in risk and probably in human cost. Beginning with capturing bin-Ladin and his key followers in Afghanistan, the proposition

of doing it with large-scale ground forces was distinctly untenable. The terrain was suited neither to such a deployment of force nor to such a mission for it if it could be inserted. There is no credible evidence that ground forces could have done a better job of navigating the caves and mountain passes and minefields of Afghanistan had they been present in mass than did the air forces assisted by small numbers of SOF troops; indeed, the logic in the other direction is quite compelling, following on the historical record with the Soviet occupation, and the anticipated loss of life of such an operation would undoubtedly have been high. Regarding the first night's strikes on Baghdad during Operation Iraqi Freedom, it appears Saddam was not killed; but this truism ignores the fact that it was the only means of targeting him at that time. Ground forces did not have anything approaching access to Baghdad that night, and to point to the failure of airpower to succeed in its objective without annotating the fact that it was the only option available is disingenuous. Additionally, one need only look to the case of ground forces in Panama searching for Noriega, or ground forces in Somalia trying to find Aideed to realize that ferreting out national leaders is difficult and ground forces often do not have a better chance at effecting success than does airpower. Regarding the inability of airpower to successfully complete "SCUD hunt" operations in western Iraq, this is well-documented; but, here again, ground force advocates fail to take note of the likely inability of ground forces to have done any better (in fact, based purely on the physics of vantage point and mobility, airpower would seem the better-suited of the two types of forces for that task). Note that during the first eleven days of Operation Iraqi Freedom thirteen short-range ballistic missiles were launched against Coalition forces in Kuwait and in the Al Faw peninsula. Most of those missiles have been assessed as SCUDs or indigenous Iraqi SCUD variants such as the Al-Samoud; however, on 28 March 2003 a missile launched from Iraq, presumably an anti-ship missile due to the flat trajectory that went undetected by Patriot missile battery radars, impacted in Kuwait City damaging a mall. Because the range of this missile is likely in the area of 50-60NM at most, it must have been launched from close proximity to Kuwait; an area covered with and purportedly "controlled" by US and Coalition ground forces. Obviously, then, finding mobile missile launchers presents a daunting task for any type of military force; how much more so when you're forced to look from on the ground. Additionally, large-scale ground forces' presence can

be clearly seen, and therefore much more readily avoided than can airpower or space-based surveillance, making the task of finding mobile launchers in the desert that much harder. Finally, as to the fallibility of tactical air and space-based BDA, there can be no denying it. Fighter and bomber pilots routinely report having destroyed targets that are either not destroyed or perhaps were not valid targets to begin with. Mobile threat systems combined with enemies well-versed in concealment techniques do not aid matters. However, the question is: at what cost could ground-based forces do a better job, if indeed they even could? Ground-based reconnaissance, while valuable, puts troops at significant risk, and renders them vulnerable to Third World and guerrilla-style tactics and threats that have no effect on airpower. True, airpower does not provide flawless BDA, nor flawless intelligence of any type for that matter; but on the scale of costs versus benefits, I contend that knowing the precise numbers of tanks destroyed in Kosovo or whether the fire-control radar that gun-camera video clearly shows being destroyed was real or a decoy is a far second on the priority list to having troops on the ground in harm's way trying to find out.

I would add that ground power's capabilities vis-à-vis airpower's should be examined under the light of my assertions from Chapters 2 and 3; namely, that given the sensitivities of the current position of the US as the sole superpower, and the fact that airpower is viewed internationally as less provocative and imperialistic, respectively, where there is a close call in capabilities the US should defer to airpower to try to get the job done.

### **Capabilities of Airpower and Ground Power as compared to the Threat**

As outlined above, airpower from all services in the aggregate has evolved into a highly technical force capable of both monitoring and striking targets of myriad varieties with great precision under a growing magnitude of conditions from an equally overwhelming number of platforms. The enemy threat, it is safe to say, has not evolved along the same lines or at the same pace, lending additional credence to the power of US airpower.

There are only a handful of remaining regional powers that possess the capability and sophistication to continue developing and producing what is commonly referred to as



fifth-generation weaponry capable of threatening the state-of-the-art air force of the US; fortunately, none of them (e.g., Britain, France, Israel, Russia, Ukraine) are currently hostile to the US, and the likelihood of military action between the US and any of these states in the near-term remains low. Many other states possess advanced weaponry that has been exported to them from the US or these other originator states (e.g., China, India, Abu Dhabi, etc.), however there, too, the likelihood of US military action is currently low. Analysts instead suggest that the countries the US would most likely find itself conducting war in or against in the next ten years are the Third World nations where regimes are either incapable of or unwilling to stomp out terrorist elements within their borders. These are the countries where the US will most likely find itself involved in military action, but these are also often countries that have little capability to threaten a First World air force.

Remaining above the detailed minutiae, no statement as to US airpower's capabilities is fully complete without recognizing the vast expanse between its capabilities and the capabilities of the threat nations and forces it will likely encounter.

The vast majority of today's airpower assets were designed specifically to defeat the threats of the most advanced nations. However, while those nations do not pose a significant level of military threat at this time, they have also exported their weaponry in many cases to states where the US could quite possibly see near-term military action. Certainly Iraq is the recipient of weapons from Russia, for instance, as are China, India, Iran and North Korea. Fortunately, these proliferated later-generation aircraft, missiles, radar and communications jammers, etc., are precisely the threat the US has developed its own weapons to counter, and the record is clear that this development effort has been a success. This is not to say airpower is impervious to the adversary weaponry it will face; but rather, that it was designed and trained to face a much higher standard of enemy than it will likely encounter in the near-term. In fact, much greater in number across the board (and, therefore, much more likely to be encountered by US air forces) are the numbers of older, less sophisticated weapon systems which countries like Russia and China have exported in large bargain-basement quantities as they upgraded their own forces. Interestingly, in some cases these older systems have posed a greater threat to US airpower than have the newer models; largely because their specifications and parameters

occasionally fall outside the envelope of what US weaponry was designed to counter in the newer systems. Additionally, many Third World countries have taken to “tweaking” their imports, or else designing their own indigenous copies, in both instances generating systems that operate at parameters not anticipated by US weapons designers. Fortunately, there are both entire organizations and established methods in place in the US to ensure that these modifications are detected and adapted to, and, on whole, it is a very effective system.

Further, the weaponry is only part of the equation. Even the most advanced fighter aircraft, for instance, is of no use in the hands of a country that cannot employ it effectively. US air forces’ training is much more rigorous than, and ultimately significantly ahead of, even the most advanced countries, with the possible exception of Israel (again, not a near-term war threat).

Perhaps the biggest negative impacts on airpower’s effectiveness come, not from enemy military threats per se, but from other tactics enemies have used against the US in the past. These include placing what would be valid military targets in amongst schools or hospitals or residential neighborhoods, or withdrawing military forces into urban areas replete with civilians. Truly, these types of denial are problematic for airpower. In some cases intelligence assets are able to ferret targets out and find ways to strike them anyway. In other instances small inserted SOF teams can do the trick. At other times, particularly as regards airpower in an urban environment, there may be no practicable option. Here often the proponents of ground combat exclaim “Ah ha!” and proceed to chalk this up as an instance where large-scale ground forces are clearly warranted. I assert, however, and current events would back me up, that in these cases ground forces do not represent a viable alternative to airpower. This is for a number of reasons, the first and foremost of which is the vulnerability of ground forces relative to what they add to the fight. Particularly in a Third World nation where the threat to aircraft is negligible, the means are usually both present and prevalent by which enemy forces can threaten ground operations. The very logistics lines that keep their operations alive, for instance, are subject to guerrilla harassment and interdiction. Ground force personnel themselves are vulnerable to suicide or guerrilla attacks and chemical bombardment, as well as to mines and surface-to-surface missiles (weapons common in even the poorest countries’

arsenals). Further, heavy ground forces need port access to be brought in by ship; and while virtually all nations with port access have mine laying capabilities, and the US ability to effectively clear them is often wanting. Third, ground forces have limited deployment options, in that they must be placed in or adjacent to the country of action. This leaves much less room for the diplomatic waltz that is often required to gain permission to stage a large force out of a foreign country. All three of these issues have been quite evident problems during Operation Iraqi Freedom, demonstrating that even for the ground forces of today a reinvigorated threat of yesterday's ilk still holds sway. Fourth, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, how the US conducts its international affairs, particularly those involving the flexing of military muscle, is of considerable concern to other major powers in the world. The potential for international backlash is much greater when ground forces are sent into the territory and urban centers of sovereign countries; cries of "occupiers" and "invaders" have at times drown out the voices of those calling US ground forces in Iraq "liberators." Finally, the crux of the issue remains: how well can ground forces really conduct urban operations against guerrilla-style enemies and fearful populations themselves? Here the historical record is unequivocal and unfavorable; we can only hope Operation Iraqi Freedom will add new data points, but the likelihood is low, and the price will assuredly be high. Rather, perhaps in some instances the answer is simply that the military instrument, in any of its forms, cannot do the trick; or, at least, that it cannot do it with the high level of precision and low risk of life asked of it. If the country's senior leadership is willing to suffer the political fallout of eradicating the threat from a city (and, in all likelihood, the city itself), then again airpower is the best instrument of military power for the job. Otherwise, neither ground nor airpower can claim urban warfare as its forte with any degree of credibility.

### **Likely Future Missions for US Military**

A quick survey of the international landscape should lead one to conclude that large-scale "Fulda Gap"-style battles are, in all likelihood, a thing of the past. With the end of the Cold War (and arguably even before), none of the world's regional powers are spending the bulk of their defense budgets preparing for a second World War II-type conflict. Certainly the world still has land armies; and a case could be made for a few

regions to flare up such that they are called into play. India has mobilized its ground forces to threaten Pakistan in recent years; the People's Republic of China (PRC) Red Army looms as a menace to both India and Taiwan; innumerable countries in Africa have been fighting each other in land battles for years; but realistically the potential for large-scale US ground force involvement in these conflicts is low. Even a Chinese threat to Taiwan (which the US has vowed to protect against forcible annexation by the PRC) is more likely to be met with a US Air Force and US Navy airpower response than with the use of massive ground forces; Taiwan could not support a massive troop deployment and the likelihood of the US sending ground forces into mainland China hovers just above zero. The same could be said for Iraq, which has repeatedly threatened US interests in the Gulf Region; first by invading Kuwait and finally by refusing to relinquish its WMD. The fact that ultimately about 250,000 troops in that region fought in Operation Iraqi Freedom, including a large ground force contingent, does not invalidate my assessment. At no point have I stated ground forces are incapable of conducting successful warfare under these types of condition; rather my contention is that quite often air forces can do it as well, and the political ramifications that result from its employment are more desirable. Second, in the long-term, much gnashing of teeth will occur as to whether using such a large-scale invasion force was the best way to go; and I think the answer will come back in the negative. Particularly given what at this time appears to be a significant weakening of US international standing as a result of the occupation of Iraq. Many expect the Iraqi people, no longer fearful, will dance in the streets as water and food and medicine again flow freely, and the naysayers of the international community will stand corrected as the US is heralded as The Great Liberator. Unfortunately, the same was said about Afghanistan, and it has not proven true.

Rather, the types of missions the US military will embark upon in the next ten years will probably look much more like the missions of the last ten years, with added emphasis on fighting global terrorism. This means more smaller-scale wars and operations for limited objectives, such as ending ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, exterminating terrorist camps and strong-holds, coercing or ultimately removing regimes that abet terrorism or proliferate WMD (while simultaneously thereby sending a signal to other countries), and conducting humanitarian and relief operations. Here is where the

bulk of US military capital is to be spent in the near-term, not in waging large-scale ground combat against the Soviet Union or Germany of yore. Indeed, my argument from Chapter 2 would indicate the US cannot afford to regularly invade countries and forcibly occupy territory; the current international political backlash from Operation Iraqi Freedom only serves to further confirm this new post-Cold War reality. Certainly the US will encounter the need to use its military in the coming years. It will fight terrorism largely as policemen fight crime; in fits and starts, in conjunction with diplomacy and saber rattling, and with a multitude of both visible combat and small-scale SOF operations. The war against terror will never completely go away, and the best that can be hoped for is to keep it to a low background simmer. But fighting terror, as well as the other missions which will remain under the purview of the US military, requires a precise yet robust force that is capable of conducting operations from afar and arousing the least amount of world hostility in doing so. Airpower is the perfect military instrument for this endeavor, capable of both blunt force and precision strike, either at great distance and short notice. Combined with SOF forces on the ground as required, or in support of indigenous third party ground forces, there will be missions in the near-term that US airpower will not be able to handle.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Case Study: Operation Allied Force**

#### **Introduction**

As is frequently the case, several objectives of Operation Allied Force changed and evolved over the course of the campaign.<sup>70</sup> In fact, even at the conclusion of the war there was a level of discord between the terms of UN Resolution 1244 and the NATO requirements as levied against the Serbs in the Rambouillet Agreement.<sup>71</sup> That notwithstanding, the overarching goal of the operation, namely to induce an end to the ethnic cleansing and subsequent mass exodus of Albanians from Kosovo and to compel the withdrawal of the Former Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) Army and Special Police from the province, remained constant. The manner in which that goal was to be attained, and some of the lesser objectives that had more to do with post-war structuring of Kosovo's government and the presence of peacekeepers, were more contentious and fluid. The reason for going to war in Serbia once diplomacy had failed, however, and the ends the US and NATO leadership hoped to attain in doing so, did not flag. Succinctly stated in a White House press briefing in the early days of the war, Secretary of Defense (SecDef) Cohen paraphrased President Clinton's stated objectives for the campaign as: number one, to demonstrate resolve on the part of the NATO Alliance; number two, to deter FRY President Slobodan Milosevic from carrying out his campaign of ethnic cleansing; and third, failing that, to make him pay a serious and substantial price for

#### **Notes**

1. Sean Kay, "After Kosovo: NATO's Credibility Dilemma," *SAGE Publications* 31, no. 1 (March 2000): 71-75.
2. Hosmer, Stephen T, *Why Milosevic Decided to Settle When He Did* (Santa Monica, CA.: RAND, 2001): xxi.

doing so and to seriously diminish his military capability through the use of airpower.<sup>72</sup> These core strategic objectives held fairly constant throughout the 78-day campaign against Serbia. The question, then, is were they accomplished, and, if so, what was airpower's role in achieving them? If my premises from previous chapters are correct, then an examination of the Kosovo campaign should demonstrate not only that airpower was able to successfully achieve the national policy goals the military was charged with, but also that the use of airpower to accomplish this mission resulted in less international consternation than presumably would have the deployment of massive ground forces into this sovereign territory.

### **Operation Allied Force and the Success of Airpower**

As regards the aforementioned strategic goals senior-level officials set out for NATO airpower in Operation Allied Force, there can be no doubt that they were accomplished<sup>73</sup> At the end of the 78-day campaign, cleansing of ethnic Albanians from Kosovo had been halted (as had the massive cross-border flow of displaced persons), and Milosevic agreed to remove his army and special police elements to outside a delineated buffer zone north of the province. He was further compelled to allow the presence of international peacekeepers within Kosovo, something he had previously vehemently opposed, thus setting up conditions for what would become post-conflict management operations.

Despite what I submit is the unequivocal success of airpower in achieving the objectives policymakers laid out for it, however, critics remain. Some detractors of airpower's success criticize the aftermath of the conflict, including the degree to which the Albanian paramilitary insurgent group in Kosovo, the Kosovo Liberation Army, was left largely intact despite formal agreements that they would disband (and the extent to which it then proceeded to conduct harassment and cleansing of its own against the ethnic

#### **Notes**

3. Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen, Press Briefing, released by the White House Office of the Press Secretary, Washington D.C., 5 April 1999.

4. There remains, however, disagreement as to whether airpower was responsible for accomplishing these goals. Some argue it was the withdrawal of Russian support for the Milosevic regime, others assert it was the threat of ground forces that caused Milosevic to accede to NATO demands. What is clear, however, is that the strategic goals were achieved, and ground power was not used. See Hosmer, Part I; see also Lambeth, *Transformation*, Chap 6; see also Robert Pape, "Wars Can't Be Won Only From Above," *New York Times*, 21 March 2003; see also Michael McGwire, "Why did we bomb Belgrade?" *International Affairs* 76, no. 1 (January 2000): 1-23.

Serbs remaining in the province). This, however, is beyond the scope of my argument, as it is beyond the mission that airpower was given to accomplish. Other critics denigrate the airpower victory in Serbia by noting that it took too long, as addressed in the previous chapter; although, again, this was less the fault of airpower than of those charged with identifying military targets that would achieve the desired political end-state effect with the most rapidity. Along those same lines, some argue NATO's bombing, combined with airpower's admitted lack of ability to stop the ethnic cleansing at the outset, ultimately resulted in the acceleration of the forcible removal of Albanians from their homes.<sup>74</sup> Yet this, too, was the result of the initial misuse of airpower more than any flaw in airpower itself; viz., even the world's best air forces could not defeat Milosevic because of the mismatch between NATO's early strategy of dropping bombs in Kosovo and the task of preventing ethnic cleansing.<sup>75</sup> Still others claim the air war resulted in excessive damage to the Serbian civilian infrastructure.<sup>76</sup> Unfortunately, in the case of Serbia, effecting the targets the regime valued and relied upon most required the destruction of a number of non-military (or at least dual-use) targets which comprised that target set (including bridges, industrial plants, petroleum facilities, and electrical power plants, and telecommunications stations).<sup>77</sup> Certainly, unintended collateral damage and civilian loss occurred as well; however, while regrettable, such is often the case in war, regardless of which arm of the military is used. If anything, the exclusive use of airpower, with its precision capability and, in this case, the strict NATO target vetting process, restricted levels of collateral damage to the barest minimum that could reasonably have been expected from any type of military force employment. Further, one looking to place

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5. "Had NATO not bombed, Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic still would have moved against the Albanian population (as he had the previous year), but the Serbians might not have accelerated the killing or expanded their deadly reach to so many communities for fear of provoking NATO intervention. In that ironic sense, NATO's decision to launch the air campaign while ruling out the use of ground forces lifted a key constraint on Milosevic. As a result, the allies utterly failed to achieve two of the three objectives Clinton listed the day the bombing started: 'to deter an even bloodier offensive against innocent civilians in Kosovo and, if necessary, to seriously damage the Serbian military's capacity to harm the people of Kosovo.'" Ivo H. Daalder and Michael E. O'Hanlon, "Unlearning the Lessons of Kosovo," *Foreign Policy*, no. 116 (Fall 1999): 130.

6. Benjamin S. Lambeth, *NATO's Air War For Kosovo: A Strategic and Operational Assessment* (Santa Monica, CA.: RAND, 2001), 179-205.

7. Jimmy Carter, "Have We Forgotten The Path To Peace?" *New York Times*, 27 May 1999, n.p., on-line, Internet, 6 April 2003, available from <http://www.globalcommunity.org/cgpub/45/carter.htm>.

8. "Why Milosevic Decided to Settle the Conflict Over Kosovo When He Did," *RAND Research Brief RB-71*, 2001, n.p., on-line, Internet, 11 December 2001, available from <http://www.rand.org/publications/RB/RB71/>.



blame for the resultant destruction in Serbia proper need look no further than at the root cause of the conflict itself, Slobodan Milosevic and his policies of ethnic cleansing. Rather, the larger point is that in this particular campaign, joint and combined airpower, acting completely devoid of sizeable NATO forces on the ground, was able to successfully accomplish the mission placed before it.

Outside of a controlled laboratory experiment there is no way to determine with utter certainty if another method or military instrument might have yielded results more quickly or with less destruction. What can be shown, however, is that the international reaction to the use of airpower in Kosovo was much more muted than would have been the response to US employment of massive ground forces in the conflict. Ample evidence for this claim, as well as for many of Chapter 3's assertions as to international perceptions of airpower, can be drawn from public reactions and statements by high-level diplomats and policymakers, and in fact these form the basis of subsequent sections in this chapter. It was necessary, first, however, to establish that in Kosovo, in Allied Force, airpower brought about the desired conclusion without the need to employ heavy ground forces.<sup>78</sup> As the record demonstrates, though much to the critics' chagrin and largely in spite of a less than perfect employment strategy,<sup>79</sup> airpower did this.<sup>80</sup>

### **Evidence of Balancing**

The international reaction to the NATO (predominantly US) use of airpower in Allied Force was demonstrably less agitated than it would have been had the US employed large-scale ground forces; yet, there was still evidence of balancing by other major powers, including some within the NATO coalition.

The first and most visible case of balancing against the US-led efforts to end the carnage in Kosovo took place within the UN. Here the Security Council was patently

#### **Notes**

9. Hosmer, xxii, 123; airpower was the most influential factor in Milosevic's capitulation. See also Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen's 14 October 1999 statements to the Senate Armed Services Committee regarding Allied Force success, as quoted by Jim Garamone, "DoD Studies Kosovo Lessons Learned," *Defense Link News*, October 1999, n.p., on-line, Internet, 24 January 2003, available from <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Oct1999/n101419999910144.html>.

10. "Why Milosevic Decided to Settle the Conflict Over Kosovo When He Did," *RAND Research Brief RB-71*, 2001, n.p., on-line, Internet, 11 December 2001, available from <http://www.rand.org/publications/RB/RB71/>.

11. From a long-term perspective, airpower's military success, combined with carefully-chosen diplomatic carrots and sticks also resulted in the peaceful removal of Milosevic from power, and ultimately his subjection to a war crimes trial at The Hague. See also Garamone, n.p.

unable to mount action against the growing crisis because of the threat of Russian and Chinese vetoes against the use of military force to end the violence.<sup>81</sup> That this is an instance of balancing, wherein those two regional powers did not want to see the US command a power position in a conflict on the Eurasian landmass, is made ever more obvious by the fact that this was a humanitarian operation from the beginning, with a clear mandate to bring an end to alleged Serbian atrocities while leaving the sovereign borders of the FRY in place at its conclusion. This mission, therefore, did not smack of US imperialism or of unprovoked aggression; indeed, quite the opposite. There was thus no reason for Russia and China to oppose military efforts in Kosovo other than because of their purely visceral reluctance to seeing the US increase its foothold and demonstrate its unrivalled military prowess, in Europe.<sup>82</sup> Further, in addition to balancing against perceived US global power, Russia and China also feared a possible expansionist NATO committed to extending Western values, as a new type of hegemony in itself; that, too, provokes balancing behavior from other countries that see themselves as outside the sphere of NATO momentum.<sup>83</sup>

Additional instances of what I contend were efforts to balance against US primacy occurred within the very coalition of NATO itself. The nineteen-member alliance, presumably in agreement that the use of force was necessary to compel Milosevic to end the ethnic violence in Kosovo, showed indications of its own fissures and struggles against US power. The most visible occurrences of balancing were actually institutionalized in the target vetting process, wherein every participating country<sup>84</sup> levied its own restrictions and requirements on the target set, each wielding equal veto power, despite the fact that US aircraft flew approximately 80 percent of all strike sorties.<sup>85</sup>

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12. Peter W. Rodman, "The Fallout From Kosovo," *Foreign Affairs* 78, no. 4 (July/August 1999): 48.

13. Russia and China opposed the use of force by NATO (with a draft UN resolution) on the grounds it "threatened international peace and stability." Max Ruston, UN Correspondent Report, 25 March 1999, 1, on-line, Internet, 12 April 2003, available at <http://www.fas.org/man/dod-1-1/ops/docs99/990325-kosovo003.htm>.

14. Kay, 80.

15. Thirteen of NATO's then 19-nation alliance sent aircraft to take part. NATO's three newest members-Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic-did not join in. Greece, Iceland, and Luxembourg also abstained. "Echoes From Allied Force," *Air Force Magazine* 82, no. 8 (August 1999), n.p., on-line, Internet, 9 June 2003, available from <http://www.afa.org/magazine/aug1999/0899force.asp>.

16. Lambeth, *Transformation*, 213.

Purportedly, many NATO allies resented the US dominance of the air war,<sup>86</sup> perhaps because it so starkly demonstrated the extent to which US airpower capabilities eclipsed those of most other NATO members.<sup>87</sup> Thus, despite the fact Allied Force was a combined effort ostensibly carried out by a united NATO alliance, there were still signs that individual countries within that alliance rankled under, and wrangled against, the status of the US as *primus inter pares*.<sup>88</sup>

### **International Reaction to the Use of Airpower**

It is difficult to demonstrate how much less the exclusive use of airpower in Kosovo induced less of a negative world reaction than ground forces, because since ground forces were not employed, a direct comparison between international reactions before and after their introduction to the campaign cannot be made. In addition, because the Clinton administration announced at the outset of the campaign that the US would not employ ground forces, any negative international responses that Allied Force did invoke (such as the aforementioned instances of balancing) occurred entirely despite the fact that ground forces were not employed. My claim, however, is not that the use of airpower alone results in a complete absence of negative reaction, as clearly this is not the case; but rather, that airpower is viewed as a less militant and imperialistic form of power than ground power (despite its comparably robust capabilities). Chapter 3 lays out a number of hypothesized views on airpower that, if true, lend credence to this claim; what can be shown definitively is that many of these perceptions were evident in, and expressed by, the international community during Operation Allied Force. It is worth restating before demonstrating the presence of the aforementioned international perceptions that they are just that, perceptions. Not only are they not necessarily true but, in fact, quite often they

### **Notes**

17. Ivo H. Daalder, "The United States and the Former Yugoslavia: Is There Scope for Consensus," *NATO and Europe in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 62, on-line, Internet, 7 December 2002, available from <http://wwics.si.edu/ees/special/2000/daalde.pdf>.

18. Paul E. Gallis, "Kosovo: Lessons Learned from Operation Allied Force," Congressional Research Service Report for Congress (Washington D.C.: The Library of Congress, 19 November 1999), 1.

19. "For all of Europe's vaunted moves toward 'independence' from the United States, Europe's national defense budgets are shrinking and its huge military-technological lag behind the United States is widening every year. Although western Europe's combined defense budgets add up to two-thirds of the Pentagon's, they yield less than a quarter of America's deployable fighting strength. Europe's armies are for the most part unmodernized and incapable of serious power projection. At this rate, Europe's security dependence on the United States will only grow in coming years, further aggravating mutual resentments." Rodman, 49.

are patently false. For the purpose of the argument as to how the world views airpower, however, their accuracy is irrelevant.

### **Airpower is Perceived as Weaker than it Actually Is**

Internationally, airpower is generally considered to be less capable than ground power. Evidence of this perception was visible during Allied Force, when the air campaign did not offer the rapid results NATO allies had expected. While the initial bombing raids did damage to Serbian forces, they did not immediately destroy their capability to conduct their cleansing campaign against the Kosovar Albanians. Consequently, as the first week of Operation Allied Force turned into the second week, and the second week turned into the third, talk of a ground war resurfaced. By mid-April several senior administration officials publicly stated that NATO could quickly update its plans for a ground invasion if necessary.<sup>89</sup> Then on 17 May, British Foreign Minister Robin Cook again proposed that NATO consider sending ground troops into Kosovo, citing the lack of a peace agreement to that point. “The British argued that air strikes alone might not compel Milosevic to surrender, but that they might weaken Yugoslav ground forces to the point where a land attack could be conducted without major organized resistance.”<sup>90</sup> The clear, though implicit, implication here is that where airpower was perceived to be failing (or, at least, not succeeding fast enough), ground forces could come in and win the day; certainly an indication ground forces were believed to be stronger and more capable than the air forces currently being employed.

Another element of the perception that airpower is less capable than ground power lies in the belief that it is more easily withstood, particularly by a population possessed of resolve and national unity. This belief has been pervasive since at least World War II, and was in evidence here as well; at least initially. In the case of the Serbs, they have always been proud of both their ability to fight in defense of their interests and their capacity to absorb punishment. From the outset, there was ample evidence of popular support for Milosevic’s policy in Kosovo, undoubtedly due in large measure to the historical and cultural significance Kosovo held for the Serb people. As

### **Notes**

20. John E. Peters et al., *European Contributions to Operation Allied Force: Implications for Transatlantic Cooperation* (Santa Monica, CA.: RAND, 2001), 44.

21. Peters et al., 46.

late as March 1999 a public opinion poll in one Serb paper showed 69 percent of the population was willing to defend Kosovo by force under any circumstances.<sup>91</sup> In fact,

Milosevic was apparently being told by some of his [FRY Army] and other senior advisers that he would be “better off with NATO air strikes than with NATO ground troops in Kosovo.” Indeed, those...advisers apparently asserted that the rally-around-the-flag effects of air strikes would serve to strengthen Milosevic’s political hand and that his position in Yugoslavia would “wax stronger with each new bomb dropped.”<sup>92</sup>

Indeed, initially the air strikes bolstered Milosevic’s stature, and Belgrade hosted large rallies in his honor after the NATO air strikes began. It was only after a lengthy, escalatory air campaign that showed no signs of letting up that Serb support fell,<sup>93</sup> but most assuredly, the going-in Serb perception was that air strikes could be adamantly and victoriously withstood.

Allied Force also provides evidence of the belief that airpower is not only readily defeated, but that it is more easily thwarted than are ground forces. Once NATO’s use of ground forces was taken off the table, the Serbs undertook efforts to preserve their military forces that clearly would not have worked against ground forces. The Serbs dispersed their ground forces before the bombing began and made extensive use of concealment, camouflage, and hardened underground shelters. They also attempted to shield their forces from attack by locating them among civilian facilities and populations (one of their more successful techniques, given the almost obsessive lengths NATO went to not to bomb religious, cultural and historic landmarks in Kosovo). Because they did not have to concentrate, maneuver in large formations, or sustain a high tempo of operations (i.e., fight NATO ground forces), Serb ground forces were able to deny lucrative targets to NATO airpower and thus to preserve the bulk of their ground forces.<sup>94</sup> At least, that is the widely-held perception. Rebecca Grant, however, challenges what she calls the myths that Serb ground forces escaped largely unscathed, and that their use

## Notes

22. Hosmer, 16.

23. Hosmer, 17.

24. Byman and Waxman, 19-21.

25. Hosmer, 132.

of decoys had a significant impact on NATO airpower success.<sup>95</sup> She cites in-depth after-action reports that discredit both those claims; but, even in doing so, she supports the argument that, in fact, these were the perceptions the international community (US included) came away with from Allied Force. It can thus be assumed that the belief in airpower's weaknesses as compared to ground power, particularly when combined with the well-advertised US goal of limiting civilian casualties and collateral damage, will continue to exist.

Part of the reason for the persistence of the view that US airpower is more easily impeded lies in a lack of complete knowledge of US capabilities, whether in the realm of surveillance or of stand-off and precision strike. This was evident in instances of Serb forces' attempts at denial of aerial reconnaissance or targeting that were so ill-conceived (given US capabilities) as to border on the comical. Apparent lack of understanding of infrared, radar, and electro-optical imagery capabilities was evident in their construction and employment of essentially cardboard aircraft decoys, their use of camouflage netting that served merely to highlight their aircraft and tanks, and their otherwise feeble attempts to conceal their equipment in tree lines or in fields.<sup>96</sup> There were other (primarily US) capabilities that were widely misunderstood or underestimated, such as the ability of the B-2 to fly round-trip sorties from Whiteman AFB, Missouri dropping highly-precise, all-weather Joint Direct-Attack Munitions (considered by many, in fact, to be the most effective platform in the war<sup>97</sup>); the surveillance and targeting capability that UAVs could add through their ability to loiter for up to 24 hours over the target area, providing real-time imagery, and later providing laser designation of targets for A-10s and F-16s<sup>98</sup>; and US space capabilities, not well-advertised to this day, due to classification concerns, were on the list of means NATO had at its disposal that were not

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26. Rebecca Grant, "Nine Myths About Kosovo," *Air Force Magazine* 83, no. 6 (June 2000), n.p., on-line, Internet, 11 June 2003, available from <http://www.afa.org/magazine/june2000/0600kosovo.asp>.

27. Often the use of even flimsy camouflage attempts are said to be intended more as a method of obscuring the target from the pilot in the high-speed attack jet versus the space-based or high-altitude surveillance platforms. If true, however, this further indicates an adversary lack of knowledge of how today's US fighters not only have multi-sensor capabilities that negate many camouflage techniques, but that they are also typically fed target coordinates from off-board surveillance sensors which are not obscured by these efforts. The result is that today's US fighters have significantly less need to hunt for targets in the target area than was previously the case, so feeble camouflage efforts tend to be ineffective.

28. Lambeth, *NATO's Air War*, 89.

29. Lambeth, *NATO's Air War*, 95.

well understood by the enemy (indeed, many of these capabilities were either invented or fine-tuned mid-stream, such that even the US was not fully aware of them at the outset). This lack of understanding contributed not only to NATO's ultimate success in the war; but, more importantly for the purpose of my argument, to the Serb and international perception that airpower would be easier to defeat than would large-scale NATO ground forces.

### **Airpower is Perceived as Less Imperialistic than Ground Forces**

One of NATO's main going-in positions on sending forces into the FRY was that once the ethnic cleansing had been halted, the FRY's sovereign borders would remain intact (viz., as they existed at the start of the campaign). There were certainly machinations during the various phases of diplomacy as to how the autonomy of Kosovo would be addressed within the FRY; but, for the most part, NATO recognized that insistence on a Kosovar vote for independence was a nonstarter.<sup>99</sup> It would seem, then, that in this case, demonstrating international acceptance of airpower as a less imperialistic means of force would be difficult, as NATO had declared at the outset that the sovereign state it was entering would remain as such once the ongoing humanitarian disaster was addressed. However, precisely the opposite is the case: it was in fact that very international perception of airpower as more benign that made its use in Kosovo much more palatable than would have been the use of ground forces; i.e., the use of airpower, perceived as less imperialistic because of its widely-acknowledged inability to take and to hold territory, essentially underwrote NATO's stated intent. That airpower was an acceptable means of force to many countries that vehemently opposed the use of ground forces is a verifiable matter of record (and indeed was a key consideration in NATO's early and repeated pronouncements that ground forces would not be used<sup>100</sup>). The Greek government, for instance, believed an air campaign was the only viable option. It found itself in a precarious position between its alliance commitments and its

### **Notes**

30. There were many reasons for this, not the least of which was the 90 percent ethnic Albanian majority in Kosovo at the start of the conflict, effectively sealing the outcome of any vote. Further, Milosevic and the Serb people would never have countenanced an independent Kosovo due to its prominent place in their history. Finally, there was fear that even the intimation that such a vote might be imposed on the FRY would further speed up the ethnic cleansing to alter the ethnic demographics (incidentally, the same argument was made about fears of partitioning Kosovo). See Hosmer, Chapter 1.

31. Peters et al., 9-25.

need to appear responsive to Greek public opinion--which was firmly against the Kosovo campaign--and it believed this tricky balance would be shattered and their government would fall from power if NATO so much as suggested the possibility of a ground war. (This has added significance in that the best way to transport ground troops and their equipment to Kosovo would have been through the Greek port of Thessaloniki; however, throughout the duration of Allied Force Greece repeated it would not allow any NATO ground forces to transit through Thessaloniki).<sup>101</sup> German officials shared similar concerns about the stability of their own government, and expressed fears that even considering NATO ground force employment would shatter their governmental coalition.<sup>102</sup> Other states also voiced concern that their governments could fall, or that their domestic positions would be greatly weakened, if NATO signaled the possibility of invading the FRY with ground troops. It was largely for this reason, to maintain an already fragile consensus within the Alliance, that NATO announced it had no intention of fighting a ground war in Kosovo.<sup>103</sup>

NATO's adamant insistence that it would leave FRY borders intact and would not use ground forces (it would be difficult to do the former without the latter) was intended for a wider audience than just the populations in Alliance countries. Many other actors had clearly articulated misgivings about NATO intervention in the FRY, not the least of which was the UN in general, Russia and China in specific, and Milosevic and the Serbian people themselves. One of the main reasons the UN would not act in Kosovo, despite the humanitarian crisis, stemmed from the presumed illegalities of intervening inside the borders of a sovereign state<sup>104</sup> (indeed, similar arguments were debated regarding NATO's entry into the FRY as well<sup>105</sup>). Russia, on the other hand, had an eye on preserving its regional hegemony, and did not want to see NATO plant a stake in Serbia, the territory of its Slavic brethren. A ground invasion would have put Russian President Boris Yeltsin in an intolerable bind. If he allowed NATO to overrun a historically close ally, he would advertise Russia's impotence to the world. Yet

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32. Peters et al., 42.

33. Peters et al., 42.

34. Peters et al., 43.

35. Fumio Miyoshi, "Humanitarian Intervention and the Conflict in Kosovo," n.p., on-line, Internet, 6 April 2003, available from <http://www.drc-jpn.org/AR3-E/miyoshi-e.htm>.

36. John Diamond, "Legality of NATO Attack Discussed," *Associated Press*, 25 March 1999, n.p., on-line, Internet, 11 June 2003, available from <http://sane-boston.org/articles/legalityofnatodiscussed.html>.



intervention on Serbia's behalf could cause a major war Russia had no hope of winning.<sup>106</sup>

China, whose mainstream strategy analysts already perceived a consistent and malign US strategy for global domination, saw its views on the predatory nature of US hegemony reinforced with the threat of NATO intervention in the FRY.<sup>107</sup> As regards Milosevic and the Serbian people, NATO's statements about not using ground forces were undoubtedly intended for their consumption as well. As mentioned, the Serbs consider Kosovo the cradle of Serbian culture, and its de facto ethnic Albanian majority, now with their calls for independence, was already an irritant that, as demonstrated, Milosevic and the Serbs were willing to go to war over. NATO recognized that the prospect of sending what would be perceived as occupying ground forces into Kosovo would only further inflame Serb resentments and resolve and bolster support for Milosevic.<sup>108</sup> To attenuate all these countervailing views, in addition to attempting to preserve alliance unity, NATO had to walk a fine line between putting together what it deemed to be sufficient force to accomplish the mission, and not fueling the firestorm of criticism against its intervention. The path it chose was to still conduct the campaign, but to publicly vow ground forces would not be used and borders would not be altered (the latter was shorthand for not calling for Kosovo's independence). All of this demonstrates NATO's recognition of the fact that ground forces are internationally perceived to be imperialistic through their ability to take and hold land and to enforce borders. Taking land was not NATO's intent after all, so it took ground forces off the table from the outset to ensure its people and the world at large believed this.

As to airpower's ability to strike from afar, Allied Force went far in demonstrating this tenet. Clearly, none of the NATO airpower assets employed in that operation staged out of the FRY; rather, the majority of airpower sorties were flown from sixteen bases in Italy, augmented by the use of air bases in (or airspace over) Germany,

### Notes

37. Biddle, 141; see also Kay, 80.

38. Yong Deng, "Hegemon on the Offensive: Chinese Perspectives on US Global Strategy," *Political Science Quarterly* 116, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 343-347; see also Kay, 78.

39. Getting Milosevic to allow ground forces into Kosovo both before and after the war was a sticking point in negotiations. He knew the Serbian people would withdraw their support for him if he allowed foreign ground forces to "occupy" Kosovo, even under the guise of peacekeeping. Ultimately, under pressure from the Russians, he agreed to multinational (UN, not NATO) peacekeepers; however, this further demonstrated the perception that ground forces were equated with occupation. McGwire, 8.

the United Kingdom, Spain, France, Hungary, Albania, the Former Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Greece, the United States, and numerous aircraft carriers.<sup>109</sup> This reinforced the existing international views and operational realities regarding airpower; namely, that since airpower does not wreak havoc on its way to the intended target area, more foreign countries are willing to grant overflight rights than would be willing to accommodate traversing ground forces; that airpower's reach geographically allows more options for basing than ground forces would have; that this in turn allows for placement of air forces in countries more politically amenable to hosting them, as well as in less obtrusive locations within those countries (if required, for instance, for cultural reasons); that airpower's ability to strike from afar relieves potential tensions created by staging ground forces from on or near contentious borders with the enemy state; and that airpower can typically employ from outside the threat range of the enemy. The record suggests that each of these were major considerations for Allied Force. Specifically, the positioning of large-scale ground forces intended for striking into Serbia would have been much more problematic than was the case with air forces for at least two reasons. First, purely from a geographic standpoint, whether because of intervening terrain features (e.g., the Mediterranean) or political sensitivities of interposed territories (e.g., Montenegro, Greece), the myriad (and mostly distant) air bases freely offered up by NATO countries and other allies, along with the requisite (and largely proffered) overflight rights, were obviously not practicable options for use by ground forces. Simply stated, there were few viable options from which to deploy large-scale ground forces into Serbia over land or by sea, making those in existence even less favorable than they already were. Second, however, were the political aspects. Few if any countries could countenance hosting ground forces given the political climate, even if it were geographically feasible. While perhaps all of this appears to have been purely an operational problem, it actually went more to the heart of the difference between airpower and ground power as concerns the international psyche. That is to say, while air bases were made available in virtual abundance (a phenomenon made possible due to airpower's reach), there was fearful reluctance to even consider

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40. Tim Ripley, "Kosovo Crisis," *Jane's*, 1 June 1999, n.p., on-line, Internet, 12 June 2003, available from [http://www.janes.com/defence/news/kosovo/jdw990601\\_01\\_n.shtml](http://www.janes.com/defence/news/kosovo/jdw990601_01_n.shtml).

ground forces as an option, much less host them. This not only further supports the claim that airpower is viewed as a more benign form of military force, but also that its ability to strike from afar, and the consequent options that ability provides, further enhance this perception.

Allied Force provided further evidence to bolster the perception that airpower is less imperialistic than ground power; the fact that at the war's conclusion, all combat air forces that had deployed into the surrounding areas redeployed to their home stations. In this case, then, the exclusive use of airpower added credibility to NATO's oft-stated going-in position that it was not there to conquer territory or annex land. The UN forces (not solely NATO) that were inserted post-conflict to conduct peace enforcement operations, however, were primarily ground forces, and they remain in Kosovo still today (though their ability to effect ethnic stability and regional peace has been limited).<sup>110</sup> As touched upon in Chapter 3, part of the reason for the tendency of airpower to rapidly redeploy may lie in its scarcity as compared to the seemingly worldwide demand for it, or in its need to return for training; however, the why is less important than the fact itself, and the contribution of this fact to world perceptions. What the international community has typically seen, and indeed what it saw again in Kosovo, is that when airpower is used to fight a war, it deploys in to fight, and when the shooting is over it leaves. In Allied Force, virtually all of the 700+ aircraft that had deployed into the region to conduct air operations had redeployed by the end of June 1999 (less than three weeks after the ceasefire was in place).<sup>111</sup>

The preceding section enumerates a number of reasons why decision makers involved in the war over Kosovo considered airpower a more benign form of force employment. These perceptions contribute to the growing belief that the use of airpower without massive ground forces sends a signal that those using it do not have grand designs on the territory they are striking; but, rather, that they are there to underscore, militarily, some piece of diplomacy that has not brought about the desired results. Another reading on the airpower-only phenomenon, however, also evidenced in Kosovo,

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41. Shaban Buza, "Three Serbs Die in Worst Kosovo Attack Since 2001," *World-Reuters*, 4 June 2003, n.p., on-line, Internet, 11 Jun 2003, available from [http://story.news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&cid=574&ncid=574&e=19&u=/nm/20030604/wl\\_nm/kosovo\\_murder\\_dc\\_1](http://story.news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&cid=574&ncid=574&e=19&u=/nm/20030604/wl_nm/kosovo_murder_dc_1).

42. Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen, *DoD News Briefing*, 21 June 1999, n.p., on-line, Internet, 11 June 2003, available from [http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jun1999/t06211999\\_t0621kos.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jun1999/t06211999_t0621kos.html).

is the perception that the reliance on airpower alone demonstrates a lack of serious commitment to the cause.<sup>112</sup> This stems from the fact that, as noted in Chapter 3, airpower has become widely accepted as the military instrument the US calls upon when it wants to conduct limited wars of less than vital importance with the lowest possible casualties and cost. Accurate or not, this signal was both sent and received in the case of Kosovo. Prominent US figures furthered the perception that there was a lack of US resolve with statements like that of retired General John Shalikashvili, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), who was quoted in a Time Magazine interview saying, “The political support for this operation isn’t so strong that it can tolerate high casualties.”<sup>113</sup> Trent Lott, Republican Senator from Mississippi, on CBS’s *Face the Nation* stated, “If you’re talking about [US ground troops] fighting their way in there [Kosovo], absolutely not. The American people, I believe, overwhelmingly would be opposed to that.”<sup>114</sup> Further, despite the fact that, as noted above, there were many NATO member governments publicly and vehemently opposed to sending ground forces into Kosovo, President Clinton was frequently singled out as having been the driving force behind that decision (at least domestically). On the floor of the Senate, for example, Senator John McCain referred to “the President’s repeated and indefensible ruling out of ground troops,”<sup>115</sup> and retired Air Force Major General Charles Link was quoted as stating “it was foolish of President Clinton to rule out a ground option.”<sup>116</sup> The administration did try to dispel the notion that Clinton was the sole architect of the airpower-only approach; for instance, in a 28 May 1999 DoD press briefing Secretary William Cohen repeatedly stated (seven times in one answer) that there was no consensus in NATO for the use of a ground force, and that no action would be undertaken for which

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43. This is reinforced by the perceived non-imperialistic aspects of airpower mentioned above; namely, that it is perceived as less capable, demonstrates a lack of desire to conquer territory, and will likely redeploy once its mission is accomplished.

44. US Army General (Ret.) John Shalikashvili, *Time*, 31 May 1999, n.p., on-line, Internet, 27 April 2003, available from <http://www.afa.org/magazine/verbatim/balkansverbatim.html>.

45. Trent Lott, CBS’s *Face the Nation*, 23 May 1999, n.p., on-line, Internet, 27 April 2003, available from <http://www.afa.org/magazine/verbatim/balkansverbatim.html>.

46. John McCain, Senate floor speech, 4 May 1999, n.p., on-line, Internet, 27 April 2003, available from <http://www.afa.org/magazine/verbatim/balkansverbatim.html>.

47. USAF Major General (Ret.) Charles Link, *National Journal*, 8 May 1999, n.p., on-line, Internet, 27 April 2003, available from <http://www.afa.org/magazine/verbatim/balkansverbatim.html>.

there was not a consensus.<sup>117</sup> Nevertheless, the view by many remained that it was Clinton's political concerns and his fear of the frailty of US public backing of this campaign that drove him to choose the military strategy with the least risk of casualties. Consequently, many in the public eye seized on the "no ground forces" declarations as a conciliatory and ill-advised Clinton strategy for appeasing liberals and the media-affected public (who wanted action taken to end the humanitarian crisis), while simultaneously playing to the right and other politically conservative constituents who refused to acknowledge a vital interest in Kosovo worthy of putting US forces in harm's way. According to Elliott Cohen and Andrew Bacevich, Clinton's answer was intervention on the cheap.

If the costs were low enough, the public would accept the police work needed to maintain order in the provinces... Using ground forces, which are more susceptible to casualties and more difficult to withdraw, was to be avoided... Precision bombing from beyond enemy reach could destroy critical economic and military infrastructure while neither killing civilians (which might fracture coalition solidarity) nor sacrificing Americans (which could undermine political support at home).<sup>118</sup>

What resulted was a seemingly clear (whether accurate or not) linkage between a US lack of political will and commitment, the US leadership desire to rely on airpower to minimize risk, and the subsequent US spearheading of the use of airpower by NATO. In short, regardless of who and what actually drove the decision, NATO's refusal to send in ground forces signaled a collective lack of resolve; a signal not lost on Milosevic.<sup>119</sup> According to Byman and Waxman,

Milosevic appears to have shared previous estimations that American political will would erode as US casualties mounted. As he noted in an interview, NATO is "not willing to sacrifice lives to achieve our surrender. But we are willing to die to defend our rights as an independent sovereign nation." Rhetorically embellished as this statement may be,

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48. Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen, *DoD News Briefing*, 28 May 1999, n.p., on-line, Internet, 27 April 2003, available from <http://www.afa.org/magazine/verbatim/balkans/verbatim.html>.

49. Biddle, 139.

50. Kay, 78.

Milosevic probably perceived NATO's will to sustain operations in the face of casualties to be weak.<sup>120</sup>

Further, perhaps the reason the bombing did not have the immediate impact many had anticipated was because Milosevic believed he could outlast the coalition arrayed against him;<sup>121</sup> this would certainly have been a logical conclusion for him to draw if he indeed had perceived the use of airpower as signaling a lack of resolve.

That ground troops are generally perceived as an escalation in an existing conflict follows most often from the fact that airpower is usually on the scene first. In Kosovo, however, this association took on additional significance, because NATO had foresworn any use of ground forces before the conflict started (with the exception of the small number positioned outside Kosovo and earmarked for rapid extraction of Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe personnel if required). Therefore, it was clear that any employment of ground forces would have crossed the line from original intent into subsequent escalation. In fact, the record is quite mixed as to whether or not NATO ever seriously considered deploying large-scale ground forces into Kosovo, whether they even could have, and whether the Alliance would have withstood such a move. Some insist not, others claim it was this very threat of a ground invasion that brought Milosevic to his knees.<sup>122</sup> More important than the probability or feasibility of a NATO ground invasion, however, was the perception of the potential of such. Here the record is somewhat less ambiguous. While a ground force invasion did not appear imminent, Milosevic was no doubt aware of the increasing discussion of a ground option in Washington and some other NATO capitals (indeed, as the air war dragged on, debates on the need to send in ground forces became more and more public). He had also been told by the Russians that an invasion was coming, and it was likely Milosevic would have found the prospect of a NATO invasion, which might not have been limited to Kosovo, much more threatening.<sup>123</sup> The Russians, too, clearly perceived the threat of ground forces as an unacceptable and imperialistic escalation to the ongoing conflict; in a 9 April televised statement, Russian President Yeltsin stated,

## Notes

51. Byman and Waxman, 33.

52. Byman and Waxman, 34.

53. Grant, n.p.

54. Hosmer, xx.

They want to bring in ground troops...They want simply to seize Yugoslavia to make it their protectorate. We cannot let that happen to Yugoslavia...I told NATO, the Americans, the Germans: Don't push us toward military action. Otherwise, there will be a European war for sure and possibly world war.<sup>124</sup>

### **Airpower is Perceived as More Humane**

More so than any other campaign up to that time, Operation Allied Force demonstrated airpower's increasing ability to conduct surgical warfare; that is, the ability to target and strike specific elements of infrastructure or enemy forces without having to level entire cities to do it. The targeting in Serbia was significantly more precise than it was during Desert Storm, due to advancements in technology and weaponry, even though Desert Storm had been hailed as a cleanly-conducted war. By way of contrast, 8 percent of the bombs and missiles used in Desert Storm were precision-guided munitions; in the early days of Allied Force, however, over 90 percent were precision-guided (this number ultimately fell to an overall average of 35 percent for the more than 23,000 bombs and missiles used). So extensive was the use of precision-guided weaponry, in fact, that there was wide-spread and public speculation that the air forces would actually run out. The balance of these munitions was precisely dropped into small areas such as oil refineries, ammunition storage sites and troop staging areas. As the result of this reliance on precision airpower, NATO forces were able to hold civilian casualties to a low level, while concentrating on the military targets. In fact, according to Secretary Cohen, only 20 incidents of weapons going astray from their targets and causing collateral damage were confirmed.<sup>125</sup> The greatly increased expense that resulted from dropping precision weaponry verses dumb bombs further attested to the lengths NATO was willing to go to in applying airpower such that it would minimize collateral damage and casualties on the ground. By comparison, many of the weapons of land warfare (artillery, multiple rocket

### **Notes**

55. Boris Yeltsin, televised statement, 9 April 1999, n.p., on-line, Internet, 27 April 2003, available from [http://www.afa.org/magazine/verbatim/balkans\\_verbatim.html](http://www.afa.org/magazine/verbatim/balkans_verbatim.html).

56. Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen, *DoD News Conference*, 10 June 1999, n.p., on-line, Internet, 27 April 2003, available from [http://www.afa.org/magazine/verbatim/balkans\\_verbatim.html](http://www.afa.org/magazine/verbatim/balkans_verbatim.html). (These presumably did not include intentionally struck targets that turned out to have been friendly; however, those incidents were rare.)

launchers, and even machine guns and other small arms) lack the precision capability common to much of the air-delivered ordnance in the US arsenal. This observation prompted Charles Dunlap Jr. to note that “the realities of modern combat do not suggest a ground assault would have saved civilian lives. In fact, he states, “it is puzzling to the military professional that anyone concerned with the sanctity of human life could conceive that such an operation [ground invasion] would be less deadly than the air campaign that did take place.”<sup>126</sup>

Further, NATO efforts at minimizing loss of civilian life were not lost on the Serb leadership. There were numerous instances of Serb forces hiding their high-value air defense equipment, for instance, in urban areas, and interspersing FRY Army forces amongst moving caravans of Albanians leaving the province. This demonstrates that they recognized NATO was purposefully and successfully avoiding targeting non-military personnel and areas, thus the perception of airpower as humane was in evidence. To further that assertion, Belgrade greatly publicized the deaths of any Serbs and Albanians resulting from target misidentifications or errant bombs, trying to capitalize on what they must have then accepted as NATO’s humanitarian conscience.<sup>127</sup> That said, although air strikes did lead to the deaths of innocents, collateral damage was sufficiently contained that domestic and international support for the operation remained steady.<sup>128</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Most all of the perceptions I ascribed to the international community as regards airpower were in evidence, in greater or lesser degree, during the Kosovo campaign. It was not my intent to showcase airpower’s capability beyond having pointed out that airpower, once properly applied, was able to bring a successful conclusion to this conflict. Rather, my goal was to demonstrate that the world community’s view of airpower and its capabilities falls in line with the assertions made in Chapter 3. Allied Force demonstrates this in spades.

## **Notes**

57. Dunlap, n.p.

58. Byman and Waxman, 34.

59. Byman and Waxman, 35.



## **Chapter 6**

### **Case Study: Operation Enduring Freedom**

#### **Introduction**

Operation Enduring Freedom was an outgrowth of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, and our subsequent declaration of a US Global War on Terror. In essence, the 11 September attacks were the straw that broke the camel's back in what had been, up until that point, the US's arguably half-hearted attempts to fight terrorism. Evidence that Usama bin-Ladin and his al-Qaida organization planned and executed the 11 September attacks, combined with confirmation they had been behind previous terror attacks on US interests at home and abroad, propelled the Bush administration into declaring and waging full-scale war intended to finally eradicate this long-standing global threat. Operation Enduring Freedom was the first battle in this ongoing war. Its inevitability was virtually assured once Afghanistan's ruling Taliban regime demonstrated a lack of willingness to assist the US in the purge of al-Qaida terrorist training camps and bases of operation from within their country. Indeed, once it became evident many top Taliban leaders were al-Qaida members and supporters themselves, that regime's fate was sealed. What began merely as US insistence that they turn over bin-Ladin and stop allowing Afghanistan to be a terrorist safe haven ultimately became a [largely unspoken] mandate to remove that regime from power.

Enduring Freedom began on 7 October 2001 with fighter, bomber and TLAM strikes, launched by US and British forces, against a variety of targets in Afghanistan. As per President George W. Bush's 20 September address to a joint session of Congress and his subsequent 7 October address to the country when the operation started, the military objectives of the operation were the destruction of terrorist training camps and

infrastructure within Afghanistan, the capture of al-Qaida leaders, and the cessation of terrorist activities in that country.<sup>129</sup> In a separate 7 October DoD press briefing, SecDef Donald Rumsfeld stated the US military objectives were to make clear to the Taliban leadership that harboring terrorists was unacceptable and carried a price; to prevent the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations; to acquire intelligence on al-Qaida and Taliban resources; to destroy Taliban offensive military capability and ultimately facilitate efforts of groups opposed to the Taliban and al-Qaida; and to assist in the delivery of humanitarian supplies to the impoverished and oppressed Afghan people.<sup>130</sup> Inasmuch as the removal of the Taliban regime was a means to the desired end, not an end in itself,<sup>131</sup> it was not articulated initially in the list of objectives for Operation Enduring Freedom (unless one considers SecDef Rumsfeld's remarks regarding the "price" to be paid for harboring terrorists as having been alluding to regime removal). It did become clear early on, however, if not from public pronouncements (as in Operation Iraqi Freedom) then certainly based on the target set of Taliban leadership and support infrastructure, that regime removal was indeed one of the *de facto* goals of this campaign.

### **Operation Enduring Freedom and the Success of Airpower**

In measuring the standing results of Operation Enduring Freedom against the aforementioned stated intentions, Operation Enduring Freedom emerges as a successful campaign. The Taliban regime no longer rules that country, and has been replaced by an interim Afghani-appointed government, fashioned out of the previously-existing opposition groups, which is not only friendly to the West but which joins it in opposing terrorism. A still increasing number of al-Qaida leadership and rank-and-file members have been imprisoned or killed, and their use of Afghanistan as a training ground has been effectively curtailed. A significant amount of intelligence on both Taliban and al-Qaida operations was gained and has continued to prove invaluable. Finally,

### **Notes**

1. George W. Bush, speech to joint session of Congress, 20 September 2001, n.p., on-line, Internet, 4 May 2003, available from <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2001/09/mil-010920-usia01.htm>; also nationally-televised statement, 7 October 2001, n.p., on-line, Internet, 4 May 2003, available from <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2001/10/mil-011007-usia01.htm>.

2. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, *DoD Press Briefing*, 7 October 2001, n.p., on-line, Internet, 4 May 2003, available from <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2001/10/mil-011007-usia04.htm>.

3. Biddle, 143.

humanitarian relief operations, along with the strengthening of the Afghani civilian infrastructure, were started and continue to date. Further, as this operation was conducted almost exclusively with airpower, assisted by relatively small numbers of ground-based SOF, it is clear by extension that airpower was extremely successful in conducting this campaign. US and British airpower played the critical role in each battle, in making the advances of the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance forces possible, in destroying enemy infrastructure and facilities<sup>132</sup>—in short, in successfully achieving the military objectives US senior leadership set for this operation, without the need to deploy large-scale ground forces.

Despite what I believe is a clear-cut case for the effective use of airpower alone and a resultantly successful campaign, not everyone is of this mindset. To a certain extent, perceptions and statements by critics that airpower was less than successful (or, at least, less successful than it would have been if employed with massive ground forces) serve to further my case that airpower continues to be perceived as more benign than ground power. These claims will be examined below under their respective perceptions (e.g., the fact that key al-Qaida and Taliban leaders were able to escape is addressed under the belief that airpower is more easily thwarted than ground power). Other variants of critics' claims ignore my arguments from Chapter 2, regarding the need for the US to work within the construct of achieving its military successes in the least blatantly bellicose way possible (particularly when operating in Muslim countries). Thus, to say airpower would have been more successful if accompanied by a massive ground force invasion is not only jejune, but flatly contradicts US interests in conducting warfare.

### **Evidence of Balancing**

The US-led strikes on Afghanistan beginning on 7 October had the full backing of the UN Security Council (UNSC), including that of Russia<sup>133</sup> and China, both veto-wielding permanent members which have historically typically opposed US use of

### **Notes**

4. Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Lessons of Afghanistan: War Fighting, Intelligence, and Force Transformation* (Washington D.C.: The Center for Strategic and International Studies Press, 2002), 4.

5. Russia had a vested interest in supporting the US war on terror, as it was fighting what it called "terrorists" in the separatist republic of Chechnya. "Raids Split US Friends and Foes," *BBC News*, 8 October 2001, n.p., on-line, Internet, 7 May 2003, available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/1584879.stm>.

military force in Eurasia.<sup>134</sup> It would be a mistake, however, to assume that this meant there was not evidence of balancing against the US and its use of force to pursue and eliminate terrorists in Afghanistan. First, the 11 September attacks and their subsequent dramatic coverage provided an extraordinarily compelling case for the US to take military action. Further, the abundance of evidence that bin-Ladin and al-Qaida were responsible for those attacks (as well as previous strikes), combined with the temporal proximity of US military action to 11 September (less than a month had elapsed, and footage of the still-smoking World Trade Center wreckage continued to dominate international news), provided additional impetus for US military action. This cause celebre made opposition to Enduring Freedom and balancing against US military action politically untenable (at least initially) for most countries that did not want to appear completely unsympathetic to the recent tragedy that had played out on American soil. Additionally, the Taliban regime had already alienated most governments and public opinion in the West.<sup>135</sup> In one sense, a case could be made that the terrorist attacks had been so overwhelming and shocking, and because their destructive venom could just as easily have been (or in the future be) aimed anywhere else in the world, countries supporting the US efforts in Afghanistan could be seen as balancing against the terrorists.<sup>136</sup> Second (and actually lending credence to this previous idea), despite the fact the UNSC lent its support to the US action, there was still evidence of balancing and opposition against the US in many Islamic countries.<sup>137</sup>

Before I discuss the balancing in Islamic countries, however, I would first like to make a related point about the lack of balancing in the UN. On one hand it is likely that support was shown for the US based on the reasons cited above (visceral reaction to the attacks, wanting to appear sympathetic, fear of similar attacks on themselves, near

### Notes

6. "UN Security Council Backs Attacks," *BBC News*, 9 October 2001, n.p., on-line, Internet, 8 April 2003, available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/1588010.stm>.

7. Carl Conetta, "Strange Victory: A critical appraisal of Operation Enduring Freedom and the Afghanistan war," *Project on Defense Alternatives*, 30 January 2002, n.p., on-line, Internet, 5 January 2003, available from <http://www.comw.org/pda/0201strangevic.html>.

8. Additionally, countries like Russia and China (the former fighting Chechnya and other separatist republics, the latter having violently put down uprisings by dissident elements in their own country as well as having fueled tensions with Taiwan) may have seen benefit in supporting the US to garner reciprocal support for (or at least lack of interference in) their own military operations.

9. This supports the idea that countries supporting the US were balancing against al-Qaida because the countries that opposed US military efforts (primarily Islamic) would not have considered themselves likely or future targets for al-Qaida attacks, and would thus not have felt the need to balance against the terrorists.

universal disdain for the Taliban regime). However, there is an added dimension that still provides support for Chapter 2 assertions that how the US conducts itself affects the way the world reacts to that conduct; namely, the fact that the US went into Afghanistan after having suffered an egregious attack by elements clearly hiding within that country (thus with potent justification), after having given fair warning to that country's government, without massive ground forces, and therefore without imperialist designs on taking over or occupying that country, made it more palatable for countries that otherwise oppose American hegemony to support military operations in this case. Further bolstering that claim is the fact that a significant portion of the Afghani people themselves supported the US intervention there. This, in a country whose historical record shows its competitive tribal elements normally band together against foreign invaders.<sup>138</sup> Clearly the US was perceived by both Afghanis and the rest of the world, largely by virtue of its lack of sizeable ground force presence, as entering Afghanistan merely to eradicate al-Qaida elements and support removal of the Taliban regime, just as it stated. The gravity and strength of the support these observations lend to Chapter 2 assertions are significant.

Regarding the evidence of balancing seen in many Muslim countries, this took the form of both governmental opposition to US actions in some countries, and popular protests in others. The most vocal governments included Iran, Iraq, and Sudan; the most restive populations demonstrated in the streets in Pakistan, Indonesia, Jordan, Gaza (Palestinians), Nigeria, Yemen, and even several European capitals.<sup>139</sup> It is hard to conceive of more justifiable causes for one country to invade another than in response to unwarranted attacks and in an effort to avert such attacks in the future; yet, many Muslim countries' populations were still overwhelmingly against the US-led air raids. Given their opposition to the US in even this case, it is likely their rationale was based more on ideological opposition to the US than on logical opposition to the war itself. This is balancing at its most obvious.

## Notes

10. Cordesman, 18.

11. "Raids Split US Friends and Foes," *BBC News*, 8 October 2001, n.p., on-line, Internet, 7 May 2003, available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/1584879.stm>. See also "Anti-US Protests Continue In Muslim Countries," 15 October 2001, n.p., on-line, Internet, 7 May 2003, available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/waronterror/story/0,1361,574502,00.html>.

## **International Reaction to the Use of Airpower**

Again in Afghanistan, as in Kosovo, the international reaction to the use of airpower was more muted than would have been the case had the US deployed large numbers of ground forces into the fray. For those against the military action, much of the wind was taken out of their sails; the US was employing costly precision weaponry, widely reported to be highly accurate,<sup>140</sup> in the highest percentages of any war to date; the lack of ground forces completely disallowed claims the US intended imperial conquest of Afghanistan; and those who predicted a quagmire on par with that experienced by the Soviets years earlier had significantly less justification for such an argument. Indeed, many of the countries that supported the US-led efforts likely did so in large part because ground forces, with all they portend, were not involved. Countries like Russia and China that consider Afghanistan to be within their respective power spheres had much less to object to with the US flying air strikes off of carriers and distant bases than had central Asia become a staging base for a massive ground force. In fact, Russia's lack of objection to US basing in several former Soviet republics was again likely predicated on the fact that these were air forces and not ground forces. As previously demonstrated, the US use of airpower as an instrument of war policy sends a loud signal that once the military objectives have been met, those forces will depart. As a result, the coverage of protests to Operation Enduring Freedom was noticeably devoid of claims of US imperialism or conquest (unlike those that attended the recent operations in Iraq).

Also like in Kosovo, the majority of Chapter 3's purported perceptions about US airpower were evident in Afghanistan. It is important to note here as well that these perceptions are not all necessarily true; however, their existence can be demonstrated, and their existence matters more than their truth. This is because these internationally-held beliefs about airpower forge an important connection to expected international reactions to US military operations in the future.

## **Notes**

12. Fred Kaplan, "New Warfare; High-tech US Arsenal Proves its Worth," *Boston Globe*, 9 December 2001, 34; Thomas E. Ricks, "Bull's-Eye War: Pinpoint Bombing Shifts Role of GI Joe," *Washington Post*, 2 December 2001, 1; Eric Schmitt and James Dao, "Use of Pinpoint Air Power Comes of Age in New War," *New York Times*, 24 December 2001, 1; Ann Scott Tyson, "US is prevailing with its most finely tuned war," *Christian Science Monitor*, 21 November 2001, 1.

## **Airpower is Perceived as Weaker than it Actually Is**

There has been no shortage of critics publicly denouncing airpower's performance during Enduring Freedom, and claiming large-scale ground forces would have been much more successful. The untested and unprovable aspect of these claims makes them suspect, but by their sheer volume they demonstrate that many believe airpower to be less capable and more easily defeated than ground power.

One of the biggest criticisms of airpower's capabilities during Enduring Freedom centered on its inability to target, and then to obtain credible BDA from inside, the nearly 200 caves and well-hidden fire points in the mountains of Afghanistan. Even sources giving generally positive reviews of the air campaign recognize that "it was often difficult to even target and launch against entrances when overhangs were present or terrain was shielding the target. In short, the US...did little more in Afghanistan than bang away—with unknown psychological and deterrent effect—at hardened targets."<sup>141</sup> Typically coupled with this censure is the belief that bin-Ladin and many other top al-Qaida and Taliban leaders were able and allowed to escape.<sup>142</sup> This latter claim is often chalked up to airpower's inability to seal off caves and other avenues of escape, as well as its "limited use in locating and destroying small, dispersed pockets of al-Qaida and Taliban fighters...rapid surgical strikes by ground troops [are believed to] remain a more effective option for combating a dispersed enemy."<sup>143</sup> This perception is a good example of a professed belief about the weakness of airpower as compared to ground forces that is not necessarily true. Given the terrain in Afghanistan, the argument that ground forces could have done better in ferreting out enemy personnel is suspect. Considering the mobility and loiter capabilities of both surveillance and weaponized UAVs (unmanned combat aerial vehicles, or UCAVs) in that environment of Coalition air superiority, it is hard to imagine that forces on the ground would have had an advantage over airpower. While it is true that Taliban and al-Qaida personnel were believed to have escaped during the fighting in Tora Bora, it is also true that during Operation Anaconda, which marked the first employment of sizeable numbers of US ground forces, the "enemy once again

### **Notes**

13. Cordesman, 48-49.

14. Cordesman, 26-27.

15. Cordesman, 102.

eluded defeat by quietly withdrawing from the battlefield.”<sup>144</sup> Even with the increased deployment of US and British ground troops after the fall of Kabul, land operations were not particularly successful in finding the al-Qaida and Taliban fighters remaining in Afghanistan.<sup>145</sup> Valid or not, however, airpower employment in Afghanistan is frequently cited as having been less capable of targeting key personnel and more easily thwarted by terrain than ground forces purportedly would have been.

Another perceived weakness of airpower in Enduring Freedom dealt more with Afghanistan itself; namely, that one of the greatest strengths of airpower in a largely benign air threat environment, the capacity to fly freely over a country surveilling and targeting infrastructure targets at will, was lost on a campaign in a country with no factories or power grids to destroy.<sup>146</sup> The lack of easily identifiable targets was further exacerbated by Taliban and al-Qaida attempts to shelter themselves in urban areas, using the population as cover.<sup>147</sup> This combination of circumstances resulted in a lack of viable targets at some times, and unintended damage to innocent Afghanis on others. Collectively, the result was criticism that airpower was of less use in that type of campaign than ground forces would have been. In a sense, airpower’s strengths of mobility and the safety afforded it by altitude were discounted as weaknesses against a country with few easily discernable targets. Along those same lines, following Operation Anaconda, a fairly public debate began over whether artillery would have been more useful and responsive than airpower, particularly in cases where enemy coordinates are not precisely known. It was widely perceived that airpower had been less than successful in providing support to coalition ground forces involved in that operation, further tarnishing the image of airpower in the eyes of many.<sup>148</sup>

Adding to the perceived weaknesses of airpower in this conflict was the lack of knowledge of many of its capabilities; indeed, several of those capabilities were only first manifested during that campaign. Instances of the latter include the extensive use of Joint Direct-Attack Munitions, in particular as employed from platforms and in ways not

#### **Notes**

16. Cordesman, 72.

17. Cordesman, 29.

18. Biddle, 142.

19. Cordesman, 23.

20. General Tommy Franks, CENTCOM commander, disagreed with this assessment, testifying before the Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee that artillery was not a viable choice given airlift constraints, the altitude of operations, and munitions trajectory characteristics. Cordesman, 68-69.



previously envisioned (e.g., from B-52s, not previously able to drop them, in precision strike support of ground forces engaged in combat, not previously a B-52 role); the first combat employment of the Global Hawk UAV, a high-altitude, long-loiter surveillance asset capable of near-real-time, high-resolution imagery; the first publicized use of UCAVs (Predator UAVs armed with Hellfire anti-armor missiles); the first use of the new CBU-103 cluster bomb with course-correcting tail fins; and a vastly refined use of the Combined Air Operations Center as a weapon system in itself. Additionally, the war in Afghanistan ushered in the early days of network-centric warfare: the high-tech integration of US sensors, battle management systems, strike platforms, communications, and the use of precision weapons in new and innovative ways, resulting in a sharp reduction in the time required to identify and strike targets. Thus, with the steadily evolving precision and lethality of US airpower and weapons systems across the board, even since the well-publicized campaign in Kosovo not quite four years earlier, there is a great deal of US military airpower capability that is not well-known.

### **Airpower is Perceived as Less Imperialistic than Ground Forces**

If Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 assertions are correct, one of the most important results of primarily using airpower to conduct military operations is that, because airpower is regarded as less imperialistic, its use will reduce the apprehensions (or the evidence) of those who would fear (or claim) that, despite its stated reasons for going to war, the US is really only acting to further expand its arguably disavowed global empire. For those seeking to inspire radical religious, ethnic or cultural hatred of the US (namely those behind most of the terrorist acts the US has faced), or for those hoping to provoke balancing against the US to preserve their own regional hegemony or international stature, convincing the world community that declared US military objectives in fact mask more devious goals of imperium, is key. Thus, the international reaction to the US use of airpower in Afghanistan provides valuable insight into the validity of this thesis.

One of the more obvious aspects of air forces versus ground forces is, as referenced previously, the inability of air forces to take and hold territory in the conventional sense typically associated with ground forces. This observation has not been lost on Afghanistan, which has been the object of imperial geostrategic desires and

wars nearly constantly since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In each of these instances, and most recently with the Soviets, ground forces were employed in large numbers (whether or not accompanied by air forces, in later years), and the subsequent international reactions characterized the invading countries as intent on conquering and annexing Afghani territory.<sup>149</sup> No small factor in the international reaction to great powers fighting war in Afghanistan, regardless of the stated intentions, is a tendency to suspect the invading powers seek access to and possession of Afghani oil. Thus, to fight in Afghanistan with forces capable of taking over land provides additional impetus for such a claim; a claim, it is worth noting, that saw little airtime during US military action in Enduring Freedom. One Center For Defense Information analyst summed up differences between Soviet and US intervention in Afghanistan by stating,

This time around, the intervention is multilateral, it has the support of Pakistan and other Afghan neighbors, and is not designed as an imperial exercise. Most important, the US goal is not to prop up a particular regime or to occupy territory, but instead to do quick in-and-out strikes against well-defined targets. Conventional wisdom concluded that this would not become a US quagmire.<sup>150</sup>

A senior fellow at the New America Foundation similarly acknowledged the difference between US and Soviet aims in Afghanistan when he stated, “Ending Afghanistan's support of terrorism [the stated US goal] does not require the occupation of large tracts of its territory, the goal of the Soviets.”<sup>151</sup> Finally, a BBC Eurasia analyst noted,

The aim of any US or international strike on Afghanistan in the present context would be rather different from previous foreign involvements in the country. British and Soviet attempts to subdue the Afghans in the last two centuries aimed to establish imperial or ideological control. The [US]

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21. Mumia Abu-Jamal, “Afghanistan and the Great Game,” 18 December 2001, n.p., on-line, Internet, 25 May 2003, available from <http://www.freemumia.com/12-18-01game.html>; see also “Terrorism Questions and Answers,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, n.p., on-line, Internet, 25 May 2003, available from <http://www.terrorismanswers.com/havens/afghanistan.html>.

22. Kimberly Marten Zisk, “Why Peace Operations in Afghanistan Should Heed Soviet Lessons Learned,” *Russia Weekly*, November 2001, n.p., on-line, Internet, 25 May 2003, available from <http://www.cdi.org/russia/184-9.cfm>.

23. Robert Kaplan, “Winning This War Is Easy; Then What?” *Los Angeles Times*, 14 October 2001, n.p., on-line, Internet, 25 May 2003, available from <http://www.newamerica.net/index.cfm?pg=article&pubID=584>.

aim...would be more limited, to force the Taliban authorities to stop harboring Usama Bin Ladin, the man blamed for master-minding terrorist attacks round the world.<sup>152</sup>

Further, in a fiercely competitive tribal and anarchist culture wherein, historically, the only thing that has even temporarily bound its elements together was uniting against invading imperial powers in war, it is clear the Afghanis themselves did not consider US action in Afghanistan as an attempt to take over their country either. In fact, in addition to the general international recognition of limited US goals in Afghanistan, the notable lack of united Afghani resistance to the US presence demonstrates their own acceptance of stated US war aims as well. In fact, one book on the lessons from Enduring Freedom specifically credited the lack of a large ground force presence with keeping the US and British from appearing as invaders, equivalent to the Soviet forces of the past. The author goes on to posit that had the US deployed large numbers of ground forces early on, as some critics have said they should have, “the net impact...might well have been to...[provoke] a broad Afghan backlash and [allow] the Taliban and al-Qaida to disperse into the countryside...with far more support” than they otherwise received from the Afghani people.<sup>153</sup>

Even more conspicuous regarding the use of airpower in Afghanistan was the extent to which airpower was not only forced to but was effectively able to conduct its strikes from bases or ships long distances away. For instance, the movement of all warplanes in Afghan airspace was controlled from an air operations center 1,000 miles away at Prince Sultan Air Base, Saudi Arabia. Navy jets flew 500 miles each way from carriers in the Arabian Sea. Air Force bombers flew six-hour round-trip missions from Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, and USAF fighter-bombers flew from bases in the Persian Gulf on missions that took eight to nine hours.<sup>154</sup> Aircraft conducting Enduring Freedom operations also flew from Bahrain, Kyrgyzstan, Kuwait, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan and other distant locations. The result was a set of effects ground power alone could not have achieved. First, coalition airpower was able to

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24. Malcolm Haslett, “Afghanistan: A Tough Military Option,” *BBC News*, 17 September 2001, n.p., on-line, Internet, 25 May 2003, available from [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/1548842.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/1548842.stm).

25. Cordesman, 18.

26. “Operation Enduring Freedom – Operations,” *Global Security.Org*, n.p., on-line, Internet, 5 April 2003, available from <http://198.65.138.161/military/ops/enduring-freedom-ops.htm>.

selectively employ from countries that welcomed their presence. Ground forces would have had to deploy from within close proximity to Afghanistan, limiting their options to Iran (not viable); Pakistan (whose population vocally opposed the US campaign, making even small-scale force deployments there problematic for the country's President); and Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (both of which, as former Soviet republics, were already straining regional relations by inviting in small numbers of US air forces). Thus, because of airpower's reach, it was able to operate from distant bases whose use created far less consternation in the international community than the use of only contiguous countries (by ground forces) would have. Additionally, because airpower is nearly transparent to the countries whose airspace it peacefully traverses, and because its smaller footprint is considered less objectionable to most potential hosts, regional countries offered the US airspace and airfield options that would likely not have been available to ground forces; for example, from the outset of Operation Enduring Freedom, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan freely offered the US use of their airspace, and in the case of the last three countries, of several airfields. No parallel offers were extended for ground force build-ups; in fact, in the cases of Tajikistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan, countries that offered the US use of their airfields, use of their territory by ground forces striking into Afghanistan was explicitly forbidden.<sup>155</sup> However beyond just the countries in the immediate region (notably the only ones where massive ground force build-ups would have been useful), it is evident from reading the list of which countries pledged their support to the US once Enduring Freedom started, that the vast majority of those countries were willing to accommodate US airpower, but not US ground forces.<sup>156</sup> This is a telling observation, made all the more salient given the widespread international support the US enjoyed in the immediate aftermath of the 11 September attacks.

The US use of airpower in Afghanistan, with indigenous opposition ground forces serving as force multipliers, arguably mirrored NATO conduct of the war in the FRY. As such, speculation began to surface that this type of campaign was becoming, as Stephen

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27. David J. Gerleman and Jennifer E. Stevens, "Operation Enduring Freedom: Foreign Pledges of Military & Intelligence Support," Congressional Research Service Report to Congress (Washington D.C.: The Library of Congress, 17 October 2001), 1-10.

28. Gerleman and Stevens, 1-10.

Biddle nicknamed it, America's new way of war. Biddle links the nascent reliance on airpower (with minimal US ground presence) to an ill-concealed effort to limit casualties—"even at the cost of effectiveness."<sup>157</sup> In fact, he cites the US effort to avoid casualties as the Afghan campaign's most salient feature, noting "the US military drew back from the dirty work of cave-to-cave fighting in Tora Bora and elsewhere, relying on local proxies instead."<sup>158</sup> The implication here is that the choice of airpower sprang not from a calculated matching of means to goals, but rather from a lack of commitment to the cause and resultant insufficient willingness to risk life and treasure. This perception is not limited only to those who advocate a larger role for US ground forces (as Biddle does); numerous sources and accounts echoed the belief that use of airpower alone demonstrated a lack of US resolve in Afghanistan. Reports by several non-governmental organizations, for instance, have flatly stated the "official US policy in Afghanistan is driven by a desire to avoid entanglement...and minimize the commitment of American combat troops there." This particular Human Rights Watch report goes on to say this policy necessitates "a reliance on local commanders—regardless of their human rights records—to provide security."<sup>159</sup> The nestled parenthetical comment there belies a perception that the US would rather employ surrogate Afghani soldiers who represent something they claim to be fighting against (human rights abuses), rather than risk their own troops; again, a perceived US lack of commitment to the purported cause.

Further fueling the argument is a pervasive and seemingly widely-held belief that airpower alone is not capable of decisive action. One month into Operation Enduring Freedom, in response to a question on India's perception of the American bombing in Afghanistan, Indian President Vajpayee stated, "Only bombing cannot win wars." He added, "Bombing can only lay the foundation. But till such time ground action [sic] supplements the bombing, it cannot produce results."<sup>160</sup> By extension, then, in voicing a conviction that the US was not undertaking the full range of military action necessary to

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29. Biddle, 143.

30. Biddle, 143.

31. "Afghanistan: Return of the Warlords," *Human Rights News*, June 2002, n.p., on-line, Internet, 10 April 2003, available from <http://www.hrw.org/backgrounder/asia/afghanistan/warlords5.htm>.

32. Tarun Basu, "Ground action must supplement bombing: Vajpayee," *Indo-Asian News Service*, 7 November 2001, n.p., on-line, Internet, 25 May 2003, available from <http://www.rediff.com/news/2001/nov/07vaj2.htm>.

secure victory in Afghanistan, Vajpayee exposed the underlying perception that the US was using half measures, or “war on the cheap” as it is frequently called; from there, it is not unreasonable to assume he and others thus attributed the lack of commitment of ground forces as indicative of a commensurate lack of commitment to the conflict.

Finally, Operation Enduring Freedom provided one additional data point indicating that the deployment of ground forces tends to represent an escalation in a given conflict. As I previously suggested, the causal mechanism behind this perception most probably lies in the temporal realm; namely, in most recent US military actions, airpower has comprised the bulk of the initial forces arriving and fighting in the area of conflict, with ground forces following in mass later, if at all. In some instances this timing has been based purely on logistics. In others, such as in Kosovo or over northern and southern Iraq, the stated intent at the outset was to operate without ground forces. The Afghanistan campaign occupies a place somewhere in the middle, in that the initial portion of the campaign was indeed conducted with airpower, likely owing in large measure to the geostrategic realities of the region; however there was never an explicit statement by US officials that ground forces would not be sent. In fact, on 19 October General Myers announced that a small number of SOF had parachuted into southern Afghanistan, resulting in a flurry of speculation that a “second phase” of the military campaign had begun, and that a greater reliance upon ground forces would follow. So pervasive was this perception, in fact, that it was specifically addressed in separate statements by General Myers and later Secretary Rumsfeld, who both insisted that the numbers of ground forces in Afghanistan were small, and that they did not represent progression in a linear battle escalation. The greater point here is not that they denied that ground forces represented escalation; rather, it’s that the perception was so clearly evident that they felt the need to address it. Thus, in March 2002, when coalition forces initiated Operation Anaconda in an effort to squeeze Taliban and al-Qaida fighters out of the Shah-e-Kot Valley in eastern Afghanistan, the unprecedented number of ground forces employed (over 2,000, including 1,000 US soldiers) garnered widespread attention

in the media as the first large ground combat operation.<sup>161</sup> A week into that campaign, “President Bush grudgingly admitted, ‘These people evidently don't want to give up. And that's okay, if that's their attitude, we'll just have to adjust, and they'll have made a mistake.’”<sup>162</sup> The president’s meaning of “adjust” become clear once the numbers of ground forces committed to that operation were increased, while at the same time additional ground forces were deployed to the theater. Within another week British Defense Minister Geoffrey Hoon had announced the United Kingdom was sending 1,700 British ground troops to Afghanistan at the US’s request.<sup>163</sup> By the end of that March then, if not earlier, it appeared as though Operation Enduring Freedom was not going as quickly or as smoothly as hoped, and the additional forces being sent to the theater represented an intent on the part of the US and the coalition to intensify the conflict.

### **Airpower is Perceived as More Humane**

Despite the fact that there were reports of collateral damage and civilians being killed by airpower during Enduring Freedom, the operation was also widely billed as having made the most use of precision-guided weaponry of any campaign up to that point.<sup>164</sup> Up from 35% in Kosovo, the percentage of smart munitions used in Afghanistan (for roughly the same number of bombs, 24,000) was closer to 60%.<sup>165</sup> Statistics on the high percentage of precision munitions the US was employing were frequently bandied about in the media, often accompanied by precision strike video footage, particularly as a means for the DoD to respond to reports of collateral damage. Secretary Rumsfeld and other Pentagon spokespersons frequently countered criticisms of civilian casualties by pointing to the great pains the US had taken to limit collateral

### **Notes**

33. “‘Intense’ Combat: Attack Continues After Battlefield Deaths,” *ABC News*, 3 March 2002, n.p., on-line, Internet, 28 May 2003, available from [http://abcnews.go.com/sections/world/DailyNews/STRIKE\\_MAIN020303.html](http://abcnews.go.com/sections/world/DailyNews/STRIKE_MAIN020303.html).

34. Mushahid Hussain, “Operation Anaconda: Win-win, lose-lose,” *Asia Times*, 22 March 2002, n.p., on-line, Internet, 28 May 2003, available from <http://www.atimes.com/c-asia/DC22Ag01.html>.

35. Jonathan Weisman and Vivienne Walt, “Anaconda declared over, but work remains,” *USA Today*, 19 March 2002.

36. Fred Kaplan, “New Warfare; High-tech US Arsenal Proves its Worth,” *Boston Globe*, 9 December 2001, 34; Thomas E. Ricks, “Bull's-Eye War: Pinpoint Bombing Shifts Role of GI Joe,” *Washington Post*, 2 December 2001, 1; Eric Schmitt and James Dao, “Use of Pinpoint Air Power Comes of Age in New War,” *New York Times*, 24 December 2001, 1; Ann Scott Tyson, “US is prevailing with its most finely tuned war,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 21 November 2001, 1.

37. “Operation Enduring Freedom – Operations,” *Global Security.Org*, n.p., on-line, Internet, 5 April 2003, available from <http://198.65.138.161/military/ops/enduring-freedom-ops.htm>.

damage. In one press briefing Rumsfeld flatly told reporters, “No nation in human history has done more to avoid civilian casualties than the United States.”<sup>166</sup> As numbers of casualties varied between sources, so, too, did the extent to which the US was perceived as conducting as clean a war as possible. One of the more comprehensive and unbiased reports on collateral damage to come out of the war speaks to the bombing strategy and effectiveness of US air forces in their attacks around Kandahar, as one example, Afghanistan’s second most populous city.

Attacks on the city proper seemed carefully targeted on obvious centers of Taliban power or sites designated by agents within the city. These sites included Taliban government buildings and suspected al-Qaida meeting places, military installations and barracks, suspected Taliban and al-Qaida housing compounds, electrical and telecommunications facilities, headquarters of the religious police, and the madrassah (Islamic school).<sup>167</sup>

In that same vein, other issues that frequently surfaced in the media served to further reinforce the Secretary’s message, such as the extensive coverage afforded the new weapons and capabilities that came into use during Enduring Freedom. These included innovations such as JDAM employment from B-52s, the use of ground-based SOF to assist in precision targeting, and the myriad other advancements mentioned previously in this chapter that were designed and employed with an eye on collateral damage avoidance.

Certainly my intention is not to say that airpower is not expected or not believed to cause collateral damage during war. Rather, my contention is that through its ever-growing and increasingly publicized precision strike capabilities, it tends to be considered as a higher-tech, and therefore cleaner and more surgical form of warfare than that conducted by ground forces. In fact, perhaps the media frenzy that did result when errant bombs caused civilian loss of life was testimony to the prevalence of this perception.

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38. Conetta, n.p.

39. Carl Conetta, “Operation Enduring Freedom: Why a Higher Rate of Civilian Bombing Casualties?” *Project on Defense Alternatives*, 18 January 2002, n.p., on-line, Internet, 28 May 2003, available from <http://www.comw.org/pda/0201oef.html#1>.



## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusion**

#### **Summary**

Based on the current post-Cold War world order and the ramifications of the US position in it, there are good reasons for the US to turn to air, over ground, power to achieve its military ends abroad. Most succinctly, this is because airpower is incorrectly viewed by most other states as a weaker form of war and consequently, US use of airpower is less likely to bring about a balancing response. Below I summarize the key elements of my argument and suggest some policy implications.

#### **Hegemony and Balance of Power Theory**

Many theorists have written on the implications of hegemony and, in particular, of global hegemony in a unipolar world. Most agree that we are currently experiencing such a world order, however the agreement tends to end at that point. The main schools of thought have sought to characterize how other states respond to hegemons, what elements of hegemonic power they focus on (e.g., capability, intent, relative growth), and whether or not the behavior of a hegemon affects these calculations. As mentioned in Chapter 2, there is little approaching definitive agreement on any aspect of this issue. Rather, the implication issuing from this body of scholarship has less to do with its myriad conflicting prescriptions and more to do with the vast consideration that has been given to the subject. Simply stated, a sole global power is in a conspicuous and, in recent history, unique position. It is therefore imperative that foreign and defense policy decisions be made with full recognition of this fact. It is impossible to predict with certainty which states or groups will balance and which will not; therefore, it is incumbent upon the policymaker to keep a vigilant eye on this aspect of foreign relations

and to attempt to avoid provoking a balancing response against the US wherever feasible. This conclusion lays the groundwork for the remainder of my theory. Specifically, once one recognizes that a global hegemon must navigate the waters of international diplomacy carefully, the next imperative is to address the important issue of, “How?”

Certainly there is no single answer to the question of how to best exercise US global power while simultaneously avoiding stirring up international resentments. Even as specifically regards the use of the military in pursuit of policy objectives there are no pat solutions. However, when the US does employ military force, its current world position dictates the advisability of carefully examining prospective reactions and responses it may stir up. There are no policy constants, nor should the effectiveness of US world influence be sacrificed to appease potential balancers. It does follow logically, however, that it would behoove the US to consistently use the form of military force that is not only capable of accomplishing its objectives swiftly and with the least regional disturbance, but also the one that is viewed internationally as the most temperate.

### **International Perceptions of US Airpower Employment**

Decisions on when and whether to use force lie beyond the scope of this paper. However, when the decision to use the US military is made, airpower is the instrument of force whose employment will incite the least international consternation and which should thus be given first consideration for use. In asserting that US airpower is viewed as the most benign element of our military arsenal, I distilled commonly-held perceptions about airpower into three main categories: it is weaker than ground power, it is less imperialistic, and it is more humane. Numerous considerations within each of those groupings demonstrated the formation and continued acceptance of those perceptions over the years. These beliefs are not necessarily ground truth. Nor do all countries believe all these things about airpower at all times. Rather, what is clear is that the US employment of both air- and ground power in the last century has resulted in the existence and reinforcement of many widely-held international views about both. The aggregate result is that airpower is considered to be a less provocative, less militant form of military power when used with only minimal numbers of SOF ground troops.

## **Capabilities of Airpower**

To assert airpower is the least contentious form of US military might does not address whether airpower is capable of achieving prospective desired military objectives. Indeed, this entire thesis is moot if airpower is as benign as it is perceived to be. Thus it was necessary to demonstrate airpower's growing capabilities and the extent to which those strengths are suited to accomplishing the objectives of military employment. The case studies provided the meat of this argument in that they were both widely considered as examples of successful military campaigns that were conducted primarily by airpower. Just as important to this assertion as recent success, however, is the need to consider what types of future roles and missions the military will be asked to perform, and whether airpower capabilities will be suited to achieving those as well. Near-term missions for the US military will likely look similar to those it has been given of late. The Bush Doctrine with its implications for use of military force in fighting the global war on terror (as outlined in the 2001 National Security Strategy) provides clear guidance as to the active role the US military is likely to occupy in near-term foreign policy. It is also worth noting that in attempting to gauge what future conflicts might look like and how the US will want to respond to them, balance of power theory again comes into play. To reiterate, not only are the types of battles the US will face in the future likely to be shaped by these considerations, but the way in which the US is perceived and responded to regarding how it fights them will be of import as well.

Thus, because airpower is genuinely less likely to antagonize other countries while being simultaneously capable of successfully fighting a majority of America's prospective future battles, my conclusion follows logically: airpower is the military instrument the US should employ whenever it provides an effective choice.

## **Policy implications**

Airpower is not the panacea for all occasions that call for military force. There have been (and will be) times and situations where airpower could not achieve specific objectives, or required joint force employment in large measure to achieve its desired effect. However, in this study I demonstrated the need to take maximum advantage of

those times when airpower does present a viable option, and there are policy implications and recommendations that flow from this position.

The most obvious defense policy recommendations that follow from advocating reliance on airpower involve technology, doctrine (training and equipping), and organizational development and funding vectors. Simply stated, the amount of money and planning directed at airpower development should be commensurate with its anticipated use, and should focus on increasing both its overall capability as well as its ability to operate under conditions of denied access. Those charged with capability improvement would do well to increase and emphasize airpower employment in conjunction with small numbers of SOF forces on the ground. Recent experience indicates this type of employment is both likely in the near-term and has the highest probability for success in a multitude of scenarios. Likewise the potential for encountering denied access situations is high given the current world environment, the types of missions the US is likely to face, and the potential for states to balance against it. As such, investment in those aspects of airpower that enable its use in such situations is advisable. Indeed, any funding or development that can be directed at increasing the extent to which airpower appears less provocative (space capabilities, global strike options, small deployment footprints, precision strike, information operations aimed at showcasing airpower's non-imperial nature, etc.) would be well spent.

Additionally, intelligence collection agencies and diplomatic channels should be actively tuned to monitor indications of international balancing against the US. Policy makers and defense analysts must then be integrated into those process chains. Such a system is not only essential to mitigating potential balancing against the US, but its output will further serve to direct airpower funding and development in those ways that are acknowledged as making airpower less provocative.

Similarly, employment options and supporting information operations should be maximized to fuel the international perceptions about airpower I enumerated in Chapter 3. For instance, to the extent that the US seeks to achieve limited objectives without claiming additional territory, these policy goals should be forcefully and frequently articulated. When airpower deploys into a region to fight, its redeployment should receive extensive coverage. Precision weaponry and the lengths to which the US goes to

employ it (expense, targeting restrictions, etc.) must also be widely touted; and collateral damage incidents should be publicly dealt with on a case-by-case basis in full light of this fact. Finally, over time, effort should be directed at maintaining a careful balance between advertising airpower's robust capabilities (so as to preserve its coercive power) and causing it to be viewed as more aggressive or imperialistic. Ideally, as international recognition of airpower's strength grows (in growing contrast to the previous perception that it is significantly weaker than ground power), there will be simultaneously enforced and increased appreciation for its non-imperialistic and more humane nature.

## *Glossary*

BDA	Battle Damage Assessment
CJCS	Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
CONUS	Continental United States
FRY	Former Republic of Yugoslavia
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PRC	People's Republic of China
SAM	Surface-to-Air Missile
SECDEF	Secretary of Defense
SOF	Special Operations Forces
TLAM	Tomahawk Land Attack Missile
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UCAV	Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicle
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WME	Weapons of Mass Effect
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II

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